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THOUGHTS FOR
ADVANCING YEARS

Dr. A. G. MORTIMER

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Sermons

It Ringeth to Evensong

THOUGHTS FOR ADVANCING YEARS

ON THE TRIALS AND THE BLESSINGS OF OLD AGE.

BY THE REV.

ALFRED G. MORTIMER, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "HELPS TO MEDITATION," ETC.

"BE THE DAY WEARY, OR NEVER SO LONG,
AT LENGTH IT RINGETH TO EVENSONG."

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Dedication.

**TO MY MOTHER,
IN HER EIGHTY-SEVENTH YEAR,
I DEDICATE THESE PAGES.**

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Preface.

EVERY age of life has its own spiritual needs and difficulties, and to supply most of these we have an abundance of books. For childhood, schooldays, youth and manhood, at least, there are many ; but, so far as my own observation goes, there has been scarcely anything written for old age.

This is the more strange when we consider that everyone whose life is not prematurely cut off reaches old age, and that this period, quite as much as others, has its own character, its own trials and temptations, its own opportunities and possibilities. These surely deserve special consideration, and are not adequately treated in works on the Spiritual Life in general.

At the request of my publishers I have attempted in this little book to meet what seems to be a need.

The following pages, however, are not intended exclusively for those who have already reached the

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period of old age, but quite as much for others, who, while yet in middle age are approaching its threshold. The thought in my mind in writing them has been that the virtues and duties of each stage of life are best learned before that stage is reached.

This surely is the theory of all education. In youth we devote ourselves to such studies as may prepare us for the next stage of life, and we then strive to acquire such learning as we may put in practice in early manhood.

No one would seriously counsel us to put off the education needed for manhood until that period was attained ; for we know that those, who, through lack of opportunity or lack of application, have not begun to study till they have reached manhood, are obliged to put forth far greater efforts, and to devote more time to the acquisition of an education, which is seldom as thorough as that acquired in youth ; while the difficulties to be overcome in obtaining it discourage many and cause them to abandon the attempt.

What is true of the training of the mind is equally true of the development of the will in the acquisition of virtue, and for this reason the virtues of old age, which should be the ripest virtues of Christian Life, should be cultivated before that period is reached.

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A consideration of the subjects treated in these pages will therefore be appropriate, and I trust helpful to those who are still in middle age, as well as to those who are already in the last decades of life.

A. G. M.

ST. MARK'S, PHILADELPHIA,

Feast of S. Barnabas, 1905.

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CHAPTER I.

Old Age.

HAT is life? A journey of long duration, of many stages — infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, middle age, old age—a journey sometimes abruptly terminated long before old age is reached. But if by God's providence we are preserved from the many dangers of accident and disease by which life is often prematurely ended, life will be for us a journey of which the last stage is old age.

To be cut off in youth or middle age, is looked upon by the majority of men as a disaster, as something to be regretted. Most of us hope to complete our journey, to attain to the allotted span of three-score years and ten, or even to pass it. Most people hope for this, though they are not always willing to admit it. So that when old age is reached, and their hopes are realised, it is surely the part of the wise to be contented with old age, the part of the good

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to strive to make the best use of it. (To aid in this, is the purpose of this little book.)

Old age, then, is the last stage of a long journey. And what does this thought suggest? Many things, but perhaps first, weariness. The traveller as he approaches the end of a long journey is generally foot-sore and weary. His muscles ache from over-use; he is very tired. But this weariness is tempered with satisfaction at the accomplishment of the journey and with joyous anticipation of the rest and welcome which await him at its end. If the traveller be returning home, and the homestead is within sight, he forgets his weariness in the expectation of hearing loving welcomes, of seeing happy faces which he has long desired to see. And then, again, there is the looking forward to the well-earned rest, and the talking over the rich store of experiences which have been gathered during the long days of travel.

So is it with old age. It brings with it, naturally, weariness, but weariness mitigated by many compensations—the thought of the work accomplished, of the journey nearly finished, of the home which awaits us in heaven, of the welcome of our Heavenly Father, of the meeting with those we have loved and lost, who have gone before us to that happy home. So that, like the last stages of a journey, while old age has its trials, it has also, to alleviate them, its joys.

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But again, we may ask, What is life? A time of service, lasting through many years. And during this period many masters have claimed our homage; and perhaps in our thoughtlessness —or, worse, sinfulness—we have rendered that service to many which belongs of right to One only; for no man can serve two masters. The world has claimed our allegiance in many ways —by its pleasures, its ambitions, and, alas! by its sins. The flesh has striven to make itself our master, and has demanded obedience to its manifold appetites; and the devil, by many a subtle temptation, has striven to seduce us from our allegiance to our one Master, and to induce us to enter his service.

As in old age we look back upon life from the point of view of service, how much wasted labour we have to regret! But we may thank God with all our heart if at last we have learned to give ourselves unreservedly to the service of that Master Whose service is perfect freedom. If now we belong to Him, and to Him alone, old age will be for us but the period of waiting for our Master's Voice to welcome us with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."¹

What is life? A journey! A time of service! Yes, and also an opportunity for work. And this aspect of life is surely most solemn. God created

¹ S. Matt. xxv. 21, 23.

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■ for ■ purpose, and the accomplishment of this purpose is the work of life. Our Lord teaches us this both by word and example; for His first recorded words spoken in the temple are, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" And to the disciples, in the first year of His ministry, He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."² Then, when His life was drawing to its close, on Maundy Thursday night, He said to His Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."³ While from the deathbed of the Cross, having reviewed His life and work, He proclaimed, "It is finished."⁴

But what our Lord taught in words He also inculcated by His example; for His life was a life of work—work for suffering humanity, work for the glory of His Father in heaven, unselfish work, work which has regenerated the world!

Some people spend their lives as though they thought that the purpose for which they were created was purely negative—that they might do no harm, that they might commit no grievous sins. But whoever heard of anyone making an instrument which was never intended to be used and whose only purpose was to do no harm? It is a strikingly suggestive fact that in the Gospels, with the single exception of Judas, we find no

¹ S. Luke ii. 49.

² S. John xvii. 4.

³ S. John iv. 34.

⁴ S. John xix. 30

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man condemned for positive sin, but that our Lord rather holds up to condemnation those who have left undone the work for which God created them and which He gave them an opportunity of doing. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus,¹ the rich man was not condemned because he was rich, but because he neglected the work of ministering to Lazarus, who lay at his door and sorely needed his help.

So again, in the parables of the pounds² and of the talents,³ it was the man who kept his pound wrapped up in a napkin, and the man who hid his talent in the earth, who were condemned, condemned because they had made no use of those gifts with which God had intrusted them. And in the great parable of the sheep and the goats, in which the day of judgment is represented, those on the left hand who hear the awful sentence, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels," are not condemned because of any evil deed they have done, but because they have neglected opportunities of work for their brethren and Christ. The reason given for their condemnation is, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these [My brethren], ye did it not to Me."⁴

Surely by these and other sayings our Lord

¹ S. Luke xvi. 19-31.

² S. Luke xix. 12-27.

³ S. Matt. xxv. 14-30.

⁴ S. Matt. xxv. 41, 45.

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teaches ■ our responsibility for using all opportunities of work for Him.

When we reach old age, our work time is nearly over—nearly, though not quite ; for, as long as we live, God in His love gives us opportunities of working for Him. But when we reach old age, the great work for which God created us ought to be done ; often, however, it is only partly done ; or sometimes, worse still, it has been left undone. The last case we shall consider later. Now let us rather think of old age as a time for reviewing our work, for thanking God for all the opportunities of working for Him which He has put in our way, and for the grace which enabled us to use the opportunities and to accomplish the work for His glory.

Lastly, if we ask, "What is life?" we may reply, "It is a battle-field on which many a struggle has taken place, many wounds have been received ; and, by God's grace, many a victory won." And old age is the ending of the conflict, when the wounded, weary, yet victorious, soldier, thinks of his own country and of his home, looks forward to welcome and reward. It is the time when he fights his battles over again, recalling special instances of God's love in saving him in the hour of great danger, or bringing him safely through some tremendous temptation, and remembering that the same love waits to welcome him and crown him in heaven!

Each age of life, like each vocation in life, has

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its own peculiar trials and joys. When we reach old age we shall find new trials awaiting us, but we ought by that time to have learned to bear our trials with joy, realising the teaching of S. James, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him."¹ Old age, however, has not only its own trials, but also its own special joys—the joy of being very near to our Lord, with life almost over and work nearly done. In old age we should be waiting joyfully for the message which is to call us into our Lord's presence, the message, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."²

¹ S. James i. 12.

² S. John xi. 28.

CHAPTER II.

Visions and Dreams.



STRIKING Messianic prophecy in the Book of Joel (the fulfilment of which S. Peter claims at Pentecost) links together Visions and Dreams, associating the former with youth, the latter with old age. The prophecy is as follows: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."¹

And this, indeed, is true to experience; for the young live in the future, seeing visions of glorious possibilities opening out before them, hearing voices calling them to great works; while the old, so far as this world is concerned, live in the past, dreaming over great scenes in which they have played their part, reviewing work which they have striven, with more or less success, to do, fighting over again battles in which they have had their

¹ Joel ii. 28; cf. Acts ii. 17.

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share; although the old ought also to live in a future beyond the grave, and see visions of a life in the world to come.

The prophet Joel speaks of these visions and dreams as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which, as we know, took place at Pentecost; and S. Peter, as we have already observed, claims them as the effect of the Pentecostal gift. But if experience teaches us that all young men have their visions and old men their dreams—that, in fact, it is natural to the young to see visions, and to the old to dream dreams—why do the prophet and the apostle associate these visions and dreams with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Not because this outpouring causes visions and dreams, but because it changes their character. Before Pentecost, young men had had glorious visions of noble deeds, done at the call of duty, done for love of country, done in the name of liberty. But these visions were mostly coloured by a spirit of selfishness. The vision may have been noble, in the sense that it was a vision of heroic deeds, of splendid successes. But self was generally the central figure of the vision; success, admiration, the praise of men, were all prominent features in it. But with the coming of Christ, with the gift of His Holy Spirit, this is changed; for the *motive* of great deeds is no longer the glory of self, but the glory of God; and the *end* is not to win the praise of men, but unselfishly to minister to our brethren

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who are in the darkness of ignorance, in the misery of sin, or in the sufferings of disease and poverty.

And what is true of the visions is true also of the dreams which belong to old age. Instead of dreaming over deeds to be written in the annals of our country, and so to perpetuate with lustre our name in the memories of men, the dreams will be of work done for our Master, of deeds unknown to men, but seen by our Father in heaven—deeds which fill our hearts with gratitude, that God gave us the opportunity of serving Him, allowed us the privilege of ministering to our fellow-men for His Name's sake.

Again, we may observe that this association of the visions of the young with the dreams of the old is not an arbitrary association ; for our dreams in old age will depend very much upon the character of our visions when we were young. If our visions have been noble visions, and we have not been disobedient unto them, but have striven to realise them, then our dreams will be happy dreams ; while, on the other hand, if our visions have been sordid, or earthly—or, worse, sinful visions—then our dreams in old age will be haunted with the sinful recollections of an ill-spent life.

We may take, as a great example of this, the apostle S. Paul. As a young man he had his visions ; and we may be sure, from what we know of his character, that they were noble visions, visions of future greatness, of an exalted position in the

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councils of his Church and nation. And these ambitions were, to no small extent, realised whilst he was still young. Some think that he even attained to the honour of membership in the Sanhedrim. But, even if this were not so, the fact that after the death of S. Stephen he was sent to Damascus with letters from the high priest, authorising him to bind any Christians he might find, and to bring them to Jerusalem, shows that he was at least a person of no little importance in the eyes of the rulers of his nation. Doubtless, he had his schemes and theories for the advancement of his Church and people, and in attempting to crush out Christianity he was striving, according to his light, to remove what he conceived to be a danger threatening his own religion.

But one day, on the road to Damascus, he had a vision, which in brightness and overwhelming effect surpassed not only all other visions he had ever had, but probably those which any man ever had. This vision changed all S. Paul's views of life, altered his course of action, and reduced him from his proud position as ■ rising leader among the Jews, to the condition of an outcast, and, in the eyes of his friends, an apostate.

This vision revealed to S. Paul the work of his life. Indeed, it became the pivot around which all his life centred, so that he could not explain his life and conduct without reference to

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it, as we see in his defence before Agrippa, when he says, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."¹ He was not disobedient to that vision, though obedience cost him dear, involving, as it did, the sacrifice of everything he once had worked for, the stultifying of his past life, the abandonment of its hopes and ambitions, the loss of his friends, the surrender of the prejudices and beliefs of a lifetime.

Yet he did not disobey the heavenly vision. It was always before him, influencing the conduct of his whole life. So that when years had passed, and he could speak of himself as Paul the aged, he had his dreams, and they were happy ones; for he could say, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."²

Here we see his happy dream of the past. As he reviews his life he is able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished"—not my work—but "my course"; that is, my journey. (Only one could ever say, "I have finished My work," and that One was S. Paul's Master, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.) "I have kept the faith."

¹ Acts xxvi. 19.

² 2 S. Tim. iv. 6-8.

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All this belongs to the past, is the material of his dreams. But linked with the dreams is a vision of the future, of a life beyond the grave; for he says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

How glorious was this vision! A crown, not of gold, but of righteousness, the victor's crown (*στέφανος*), but also a kingly crown; since we are to reign with Christ. For, as he tells us in the same Epistle, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."¹ And our Lord sends us this message from His throne of glory—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne."²

This is the vision of the aged, but it depends upon the dreams being dreams of work faithfully done, of a conflict well fought out, of the faith kept undefiled. St. Paul's dreams comes first—"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." Then follows his vision—"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness."

¹ 2 S. Tim. ii. 12.

² Rev. iii. 21

CHAPTER III.

The Years that the Locust hath Eaten.

EN the last chapter we spoke of the dreams and visions of old age and youth, pointing out that the dreams of old age depend for their character largely upon the visions of youth; that those who, when young, have had noble visions, and have not been disobedient unto those heavenly visions, will, in old age, have happy dreams and still more glorious visions of happiness to be realised beyond the grave.

Now let us consider the case of those who cannot claim this happiness, who have to look back upon a wasted life, perhaps a sinful life, whose visions when they were young were earthly, sordid, selfish, filled with the mere ambitions of this world, perhaps with its sinful pleasures. For such to dream over the past, when they become old, is to summon around them haunting recollections of opportunities neglected, of gifts misused, of God's messages unheeded. Such thoughts can produce only troubled dreams, and the visions of the far future will therefore be

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clouded with fears of the judgment which there awaits them.

How distinctly the past stands out before us, how many opportunities of serving God rise up in our memories to reproach us! And then the calls which God in His mercy sent us, and from which we turned away; how clearly they ring in our ears now! Work left undone, warnings neglected, talents misused, sins committed, a misspent life—are these the materials of our dreams? And if they are, is there no hope for us? Is there nothing we can do now—now that the evening of life is drawing on to blot out the past, to secure a happy future? Yes, indeed, for there is a promise of God, so gracious and merciful, that it merits to be written in letters of gold upon the tablets of our memory. By His prophet Joel, God said to Israel, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, My great army which I sent among you."¹

In this chapter of the Book of Joel, we find, first, a denunciation of God's judgments upon His rebellious and sinful people, then an earnest exhortation to repentance, accompanied by a promise of God's mercy; and finally, what is certainly one of the most comforting and encouraging passages in Holy Scripture, the glorious assurance of the restoration of what has been lost. Not only will God

¹ Joel ii. 25.

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forgive the sins of His people if they repent, but He will restore to them what has been lost by sin—"the years that the locust hath eaten."

It seems almost too good to be true. We might think, what is lost is lost. How, then, can the harvest of those years which the locust has eaten ever be restored? The answer is God's assurance that if His people repent, they *shall* be restored. This does not, of course, mean that the very grains destroyed by the locust shall be given back, but that in future years so abundant a harvest shall be given by God as more than to make up for what has been lost.

With this passage I would associate two others—one from the prophet Hosea, the other from Isaiah. By Hosea God says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."¹ Here we may observe that it is not merely the removal of guilt, the payment of the debt of sin, which Hosea promises, but restoration, healing of the wounds of sin, the restoration once more of the sunshine of God's love—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely."

And yet again in Isaiah we read, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."²

In each of these three cases the promise is conditional, it depends upon repentance. And in

¹ Hosea xiv. 4.

² Isaiah i. 18.

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them we have brought before us, inversely, the glorious fruits of a true penitence, for true penitence accomplishes three things:

(1) It removes from the soul the guilt or stain of sin—"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The first thing we need is the assurance of forgiveness, that God will blot out the guilt of our sins.

(2) Hosea promises something more—"I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." Even after the guilt of sin is remitted, the wounds which sin has made in the soul remain—a wounded conscience, which cannot be depended on to guide us aright in the decisions of life; a wounded intellect, which leads us astray in matters of faith; a wounded memory, which constantly torments us, and even tempts us by the recollection of the evil in our past lives; and, perhaps worst of all, a wounded will, a will so weak that even when we know what is right and wish to do it, know what is true and wish to believe it, the will refuses to execute the judgments of the conscience and the intellect, and breaks down again and again in the face of old temptations.

Now, what Hosea promises is that, if we repent, God will not only pardon the guilt of our sins, but He will heal the wounds of sin, He will heal our backsliding. Scars may remain to keep us humble, watchful, and grateful for what God has

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done for us in healing us; but the wound is healed, no longer does it sap the vital forces of the soul.

(3) After the guilt is pardoned and the wounds are healed, there still remains the terrible fact that we have lost something, that the years of our life, given us to do God's work, have been wasted. And to meet this we have the promise in the Book of Joel, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." In what way God will do this we are not told. But we are told what we must do in order that we may appropriate the fruits of this glorious promise: we must repent. But what is penitence? It is not easy to give an adequate answer in a few words; since, though we may say that penitence is simply sorrow for sin, yet it is a sorrow which, in a sense, covers all our life, and involves many things: for, while the root of all penitence is simply the love of God, the fruit which that root bears is of many kinds.

Perhaps it may help us if we regard penitence from two points of view—as an act, and as a state.

As an act, it is simply the act of contrition; that is, the act of sorrow for sin, which springs, not from selfish remorse at what we have lost by our sin, nor from selfish fear at the punishment which we have deserved by our sin, but simply from unselfish love of God. Contrition is the working of God's love in our souls in relation to

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our sins, producing a sorrow, called by S. Paul ■ “godly sorrow [which] worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” And this sorrow, he tells us, is to be judged by its fruits—carefulness, clearing of yourselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, revenge!¹

But penitence is not only an act, but a state. As a great writer has said, “It is the only state in which it is safe to live, the only state in which it is safe to die.” And the state of penitence involves the acceptance and endurance of penance. It manifested itself in the spirit of the penitent robber upon the cross, who in the agonies of crucifixion said, “We indeed [suffer] justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds.”² The state of penitence makes us willing—nay, glad—to bear the chastisement of our sins in this world, and to bear it patiently and cheerfully; realising, not only that we receive the due reward of our sins, but that it is a mark of God’s love to send us our punishment in this life rather than to leave it for the life to come.

We must remember, too, that penance is not only “the due reward of our deeds,” but that, in God’s mercy, it is often the great remedy for sin; that it is the means by which the years which the locust hath eaten are restored to us; it is the instrument by which neglected talents are recovered, and character is developed.

¹ Cf. 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

² S. Luke xxiii. 41.

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Work, which in our youth might have been done without pain—nay, even with joy—has to be accomplished, and its neglect expiated in old age through patient endurance of the very limitations and punishments which are the consequences of our own neglect. We see this spirit or state of penance in the lives of all great penitents. Take, for example, the two with whom we are most familiar in Old Testament history—Jacob and David. Jacob's sins were, for the most part, committed before he left home, and were the results of an unhealthy home training, his mother teaching and persuading him to over-reach his brother and to deceive his aged father. His penance was lifelong. And how wonderfully patiently he bore it!—twenty years of exile, never again to see the mother whom he loved so dearly, and to be deceived by his own children in the matter of Joseph! At the end of a long life of penance, he says, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.”¹ That his penance was accepted, we are assured by the angel who wrestled with him all night at Peniel, and said, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”²

So, too, it was with David, the man after God's own heart. He sinned grievously, but he was

¹ Genesis xlvi. 9.

² Genesis xxxii. 28.

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punished severely. And his penance was lifelong; for Nathan, to whom David confessed his sin, while he assured him of God's pardon, told him also of his punishment, and that the sword should never depart from his house.¹

If only we gladly accept the penalty of our sins, all will yet be well. I say "gladly," because, for the most part, we cannot but accept the chastisements which God sends us; but they will do us little good, unless we accept them gladly, realising that they are working in us a restoration of the years that the locust hath eaten. If we have this spirit of real penitence, it can accomplish in a short time what otherwise might have required many years.

Look at the thief on the cross, and see how in a few short hours penance worked in him. He asked for a remembrance, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise."² He asked for a remembrance, and Christ gave him a share of His kingdom. Yes! glorious thought, and full of encouragement; it is never too late to repent, if only we can feel the desire to repent; for that is the test of our power to repent.

Of the labourers in the vineyard, some were not called till the eleventh hour. But they did not say, "The day is so nearly over, it is useless to begin

¹ Cf. 2 Samuel xii. 7-15.

² S. Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

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work." They went to work for the little time that remained, and (probably to their own astonishment) received the same reward as those who had been working all day—a penny, which represents eternal life. So they found restored to them the years that were wasted while they were standing idle in the market-place.

Of course, there is a sense in which something is lost which can never be made up. But much can still be done; for it is not the length of service, but its fidelity, the loving and absolute surrender of self to God, which makes our service pleasing in God's sight. That which will decide our eternity is the state in which we are when life ends, not the number of years we have been nominally working in the vineyard.

Whatever, then, our past may have been, let us remember that there is a future, and a glorious future, within our reach, if we will only make the necessary sacrifice to secure it; if we will only consecrate, with all our hearts, what remains of our life to God's best service, accepting gladly the penance of our sin.

CHAPTER IV.

The Trials of Old Age.

EVERY age of life has its own special trials and joys. The sorrows and the joys of childhood differ from those of youth, and these again are not the same as those of manhood or middle age. Old age, too, has its own trials. But before we proceed to discuss them, let us spend a little while in considering the purpose of trial, as taught us by God in Holy Scripture.

There are so many passages in the New Testament which reveal to us various aspects of the trials with which God allows us to be visited, that it is difficult to decide which of them we shall choose for our consideration.

First, however, let us notice the exact meaning of the word "trials." There can be no possible doubt in regard to its meaning; for its derivation is most simple and obvious. A "trial" is something which is sent "to try" us; that is, to test us. In the New Testament the Greek word for "trial"¹ is always translated "temptation."

¹ πειρασμός.

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And “temptation” properly means precisely the same as “trial;” that is, something sent to test us, or to try us.

There is another word in the New Testament which in two places is rendered by the word “trial,”¹ and which has the sense of proving, and therefore differs but little from the word translated “temptation.” We have come, however, to associate “temptation” so exclusively with “temptation to sin,” that we forget the more general significance of the word—a trying, or testing. We find it in such passages as, “God did tempt Abraham,”² and “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God.”³ God, of course, could not possibly tempt us to evil; nor could we tempt God to sin. In both these passages, therefore, the word is used in its general sense of testing or trying. God tests us, or tries us, by the difficulties which he puts into our life; and we are forbidden to test God, because to attempt to do so would be presumption and want of faith, not to say irreverence.

The idea, therefore, conveyed by the word “trial,” is that of something sent to develop our gifts and faculties, to test us, in order that we may see how far we have progressed, and

¹ S. James i. 3; 1 S. Peter i. 7 (*ποκίμων*.)

² Genesis xxii. 1.

³ Deut. vi. 16; c.f. also Ex. xvii. 2; Isa. vii. 12; Mal. iii. 15; S. Matt. xxii. 18; Acts v. 9; xv. 10; 1 Cor. x. 9.

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where we are still weak, and to prove whether we are steadfast and sincere in our Christian life.

From this general point of view it is evident that trial should be welcomed; and, indeed, S. James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."¹ This word "temptation," as we have already noticed, is of precisely the same significance as the word "trial." It may have a good or a bad meaning, according to the sense in which it is used; but it does not by any means always imply, "to be tempted to evil." Quite as often it signifies, "to be tested by the trials and troubles which are our portion in life." And in the passage of S. James it certainly has this more general meaning.

S. James, then, exhorts us to count it all joy when we fall into divers trials. Why? He tells us: "Knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Then, a few verses further on, he speaks of the reward of patience, or endurance, which are translations of the same Greek word,² for he says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life."³

His argument, therefore, is, that without trial there can be no development of the virtue of

¹ S. James i. 2.

² ὑπομονή.

³ S. James i. 12.

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patience ; for the word " patience " is one of those words which connotes or suggests trial. If we say that a man or a woman is very patient, we imply that he or she has been greatly tried by difficulty or adversity of some sort. And further, S. James suggests the inference that, without patience, we cannot be made perfect ; for he says, " Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

And he pronounces this patient endurance of trial a matter for congratulation ; for he adds, " Blessed (or rather, happy *μακάρος*) is the man that endureth." And he gives as his reason for calling him happy, the fact that endurance of trial insures the crown of life.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews these trials are spoken of as chastisements ; for we read, " My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him : for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."¹

The teaching of this passage is not only beautiful but most important ; for it corrects a very common mistake, in revealing to us that trials or chastisements are not signs of God's anger, but of God's love—" Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." And, moreover, the word translated " chasteneth "² indicates that these chastisements are educative,

¹ Hebrews xii. 5, 6.

² *παιδεύει*.

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that they are to develop our character and bring out the latent powers and faculties of our nature; for the word rendered "chastening" signifies the whole training and education of a child, the cultivation both of mind and character, the correction of faults by admonition, reproof and punishment, and the cultivation of virtues.

It is, therefore, an extremely fit word to use in this passage, since it teaches us that we are God's children, and all the discipline of life is part of our training, that we may be made ready for our true life in eternity. S. Paul tells us that, "All things work together for good to them that love God."¹ And this assertion is especially true of our trials. They come from God, Who loves us; they are signs of His love; and they "work together for good to them that love God." Love, then, is the spirit in which they must be received and endured.

Another passage which we must not pass over assures us that "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."²

Here we may learn many things about our trials and afflictions: first, that they are "light." And, lest

¹ Romans viii. 28.

² Cor. iv. 17, 18.

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we should suppose that this only refers to trivial afflictions, we must remember who spoke these words, and what sort of afflictions he experienced in his own life. He tells us in the same Epistle :—

“ In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep ; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren ; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”¹

How, then, could S. Paul speak of his sufferings as “ light afflictions ” ? He tells us. It was by co-ordinating or comparing them with the glory of eternity, which was to be their result and their reward. If we look at our sorrows and trials in their relation to this world only, they are indeed burdensome, and likely to crush us ; but if we regard them in their relation to the glories of eternity, we shall feel that the very worst of them are but light afflictions.

¹ ■ Cor. xi. 23-28.

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Then again, what does S. Paul mean by saying that they are "but for a moment"? In his case they had continued, with but little intermission, from the time of his conversion to Christianity, that is, for more than a quarter of a century: But what is that, or even a whole lifetime, compared to eternity? It is indeed but ■ moment, the moment of our earthly life.

And lastly, he calls our attention to their effect—they work for us an eternal weight of glory. But he warns us that this great result depends upon the way in which we regard them, for he implies that this is only true "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." If we regard the things which are seen only, our molehills become mountains; whereas, if we look at the things which are not seen, the things of eternity, mountains of trial become molehills, even in our own eyes.

Surely, from the consideration of these and other passages of Holy Scripture, we ought to be able to understand how it is that S. James calls upon us to count it all joy when we fall into divers trials, and proclaims that man happy who endures trial; for the trials of life are not its evils, but, if they are rightly used, its greatest blessings; they are for our training and development, they are our preparation for the life in heaven.

CHAPTER V.

Some Mistakes about Trial.

HE teaching of ~~Holy~~ Scripture is consistent throughout in regard to trials—that they are for our good, either sent or permitted by God's providence; that they are marks of His love, and the great factor in the development of character; that their reward, if rightly borne, is a crown; that they work out in us nothing less than the glories of heaven.

And yet, as we look out upon the world, trials often seem to have the very opposite effect to this. We see persons who are soured and embittered by their trials, who are discontented and rebellious under their afflictions, whose finer sensibilities seem blunted and their character warped by the adverse circumstances of their lives. We may well ask, Why is this? It is largely through failure to understand the true meaning of afflictions, to recognise in them the loving hand of God, and to rely upon God's grace to meet and bear all trials.

Affliction has one of two effects upon everyone

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who is tried. It either sanctifies the soul, leading it to seek and to use all means of grace, deepening its sympathy with others in affliction, and developing all that is best in a man; or else it sours and embitters the character, causing it to develop its evil tendencies, making the man hard and selfish. That trial and affliction may do its work in us, and that we may avoid the dangers which sometimes follow in their train, we must not only take a right view of the purposes of trial, but we must be careful not to make mistakes in regard to our trials or the way in which we meet them. Let me, therefore, point out some of the most common mistakes which good people make concerning the trials and temptations which beset them. You will notice that I am grouping together trials and temptations, since temptations are among the principal trials of our life, in the true sense of the word "trial;" and trials, in the ordinary use of the word, are amongst our principal temptations, for, if we do not bear them rightly, they lead us into sin.

The first mistake I shall call your attention to is that of thinking our trials strange and unexpected. Most people admit in theory that they must expect trials and temptations to befall them in this life, but a very large number of them seem to think that their own peculiar trials and temptations ought not to have happened to them, that they are not the sort of trials which they expected,

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or, indeed, which they ought to be called upon to bear. The result of this misapprehension, is that they meet their temptations in an entirely wrong spirit, complaining of the injustice of them, instead of bracing themselves up to meet them, and either to endure them or to overcome them.

That this mistake is not a rare one is evidenced by the fact that both S. Peter and S. Paul warn us against it, S. Peter writing, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."¹ And S. Paul's teaching is very similar: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:"² where the word translated "common to man" signifies that which is proper to man, or which is not beyond a man's strength.

Let us, then, be on our guard against thinking of our temptations as strange or beyond our strength. Whatever they may be, let us remember that God suffers us to be tempted in this particular way, because it is precisely the sort of trial or temptation which we need for our sanctification. Do not, therefore, murmur at your trials, but accept them as chosen for you by a loving Father, Who desires, through the discipline of these trials, to prepare you for heaven.

¹ ■ S. Peter iv. 12, 13.

² ■ Cor. x. 13.

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A second mistake which good people often make about ~~trials~~ temptations is that they regard them as sins and their continuance as a sign of failure on their own part. Temptations are not sins, unless we consent to them wilfully. They may be attempts of the Evil One to lead us into sin; but, so long as we refuse to yield to them, they not only do not cause us to sin, but enable us to win the glorious rewards of victory over temptation. Then, too, we must remember that their persistent continuance is no sign of failure on our part. As S. Francis de Sales admirably puts it (when dealing with temptations to sins of thought), a dog goes on barking because he is not let in, and when the door is opened, and he is allowed to enter, he ceases barking. So the persistence of a temptation is generally a sign that we have not yielded, that we have kept the door of our heart fast closed against temptation. When we have yielded, the temptation generally ceases for awhile. So far from the continuance of temptation being a sign of failure in us, it is rather a sign of the devil's anger, and he is far too sensible a person to be angry about nothing. He is angry because he knows he has but a short time in which to tempt us,¹ and when we continue to resist, he sees that that short time is rapidly passing, and is angry at the thought that we may escape from him.

A third mistake is trying to get rid of temptations

¹ Cf. Rev. xii. 12.

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by yielding to them a little; and this is especially the case in temptations to sins of thought. There are a great many kinds of sins of thought. Among the most common, especially with old people, are thoughts of uncharity, such as brooding over wrongs; dwelling upon slights, real or fancied, which we have received; criticising unfavourably other people's actions. To meet these temptations rightly, we must stop the train of thought at once when we are conscious that we are thinking about what is not right. But how many there are who persuade themselves that it is not very wrong to indulge these thoughts for a little while, if only they stop before they become very bitter or very unjust! Yielding a little to temptations, in order to get rid of them, is a very dangerous proceeding; for it gradually weakens our will and leads us to dally with temptation; and then it robs our ultimate victory of much of its reward, because it is but an imperfect victory. And further, we must bear in mind that it is most disloyal to our Lord to listen, even for a short time, to the suggestions of His enemy.

A fourth mistake is being over-anxious to get rid of temptations and trials. As a spiritual writer has observed, they are the raw material out of which our crown of glory is to be fashioned; they are intended by God to do a certain work in developing our souls; and if we were to get rid of them before their work was accomplished, our souls

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would be imperfect, and our crown robbed, perhaps, of some of its brightest jewels. Do not be anxious to be rid of temptation ; only seek grace to enable you to bear it rightly ; only pray that temptation may effect in you God's loving purpose, which is your sanctification.

5. A fifth mistake is thinking that our ~~temptations~~ ^{trial} are greater than we can bear, and so becoming discouraged. How frequently we meet with persons who say they are tried beyond endurance, who really give up struggling against temptation, because they have come to believe that they cannot conquer their own particular temptations ! Hear what S. Paul says to such : "God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make the way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."¹ This passage deserves our most serious consideration. It forbids us ever to say that we are tempted above our ability. It assures us, on the authority of God's own faithfulness, that He will not suffer us to be tempted above our ability ; so that we must never say that we cannot conquer our temptations ; for, as S. Paul tells us, there is always the way of escape, if we will only use it.

The trouble, however, is that many people do not wish to use the way of escape which God has provided for them, and therefore it is their own fault that they are overcome by their temptations.

¹ Cor. x. 13.

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There is a beautiful passage in S. Ephrem Syrus, in which he likens the soul under temptation, but in God's hands, to the vessels which the potter makes. They are made of clay, in itself poor material, and quite useless until it has passed through the furnace and been hardened by exposure to its heat. The potter watches the vessels in the furnace, and tempers the heat with great judgment, so that it may exactly effect its purpose. Too little heat, and the vessels would not be properly hardened; too much, and they would be cracked and ruined. Then, not only does the potter regulate the heat of the furnace, but the time during which the pots are exposed to its operation. If he withdrew them too soon, they would still be soft and useless; if he left them in too long, they would become broken and spoiled. So, says S. Ephrem, does God deal with us, and out of vessels of human clay makes the saints of heaven. And the process is the same—the human clay has to pass through the furnace of trial and temptation; and those trials and temptations are, so to speak, graduated precisely to each one's ability to bear them } if they were too great, the soul would yield to the temptation and be ruined; if too little, it could not develop that measure of sanctity which would entitle it to its place in heaven.

Then again, as to the duration of trial or temptation. If the soul is exposed to the fiery

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heat for too long a period, it might be overcome by it ; if withdrawn too soon, its sanctity would not be complete. What can be more full of encouragement than the thought of God as the great Potter, watching each vessel of clay in the furnace of trial and temptation in this world, withdrawing it just at the right time, and assuring the soul, before it enters the furnace, that it shall not be tempted above that it is able, but that a way to escape will be made, not in order that the soul may get rid of temptation, but that it may be able to bear it !

6. The sixth mistake we make is generally about bearing trial or temptation. With every trial God sends grace, that we may be able to bear it ; so that temptation and trial is like a spiritual barometer, which enables us to measure the amount of grace which God has given us. A barometer, as we know, is an instrument for measuring the weight of the air. The air varies according to the atmospheric conditions, and the column of mercury is balanced by the pressure or weight of the air. Similarly, since God with every temptation sends grace to enable us to bear it, we may measure the amount of grace God has bestowed upon us, by the pressure or weight of temptation which we experience. Grace is not given us where it is not needed ; it is given to be used, so that, as the hymn reminds us,

“ Let not fears your course impede,
Great your strength, if great your need.”

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The last mistake is refusing to seek or to use the means of escape which God provides. This is not the same in every temptation, or for every person; but there always is the way of escape, that is, some one special means of grace by which we may be able to bear the temptation. In our Bibles, unfortunately, we read, God "will with the temptation also make a way to escape." In the original it is, "*the* way," that is, one special way for each temptation. For some, it is greater earnestness in prayer; for others, meditation on God's holy Word; very often, it is the use of some special Sacrament. But there is always the way by which we may be able to bear our trials, and we must never rest satisfied till we have sought out and found that way,

CHAPTER VI.

The Way to Meet our Trials.

WE have considered the purpose of trial and temptation, and some of the mistakes into which people fall in regard to them. Now let us ask how best we may meet these trials. First, we must meet them with a thorough reliance upon God's aid. Each trial either is sent by God or permitted by Him, and therefore, with each trial we know God will send us the grace we need to enable us to bear it. We know that God is on our side in the struggle—more, that our Lord Jesus Christ is in us, helping us to bear the cross which has been sent us. We must say, in times of great adversity, what the Psalmist did, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid? Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid: and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him."¹

¹ Psalm xxvii. 1, 3.

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The way to show our trust in God, our reliance upon His help, is to make what is called an "act of faith," like that we have just quoted. The Psalter is full of such acts. There are times when an act of faith is better even than prayer. After we have been praying for a long period without apparent result, then is the time to make the act of faith, that is, to insist upon our perfect trust in God. We find a very beautiful example of this in the 62nd Psalm—"My soul truly waiteth still upon God: for of Him cometh my salvation. He verily is my strength and my salvation: He is my defence, so that I shall not greatly fall."¹ In this Psalm there is no word of prayer: It is simply a series of acts of faith, of faith growing stronger as the Psalmist proceeds. He begins by expressing his determination to wait upon God; that is, to tarry the Lord's leisure. He is enabled to wait patiently, because God is his strength and salvation. Therefore, though there may be some failure, he says, "I shall not greatly fall."

In the fifth and sixth verses he repeats his act of faith, but on a higher plane. He says, "Nevertheless, my soul, wait thou still upon God: for my hope is in Him. He truly is my strength and my salvation: He is my defence, so that I shall not fall." The words are almost the same; but in the first act of faith he says, "I shall not *greatly* fall." In the second he says, "I shall not fall;"

¹ Psalm lxii. 1. 2.

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that is, not fall at all. Then he bursts out into exultation, saying, "In God is my health, and my glory: the rock of my might, and in God is my trust."

We must meet our trials, then, first, with an act of faith that God will help us. This is beautifully expressed in another Psalm: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh even from the Lord, Who hath made heaven and earth."¹ But the Psalter is full of such examples.

Then, next, we must meet our trials in ■ spirit of humility; not in proud self-confidence, but in humble trust in God. In the great storm the oak stands, the type of proud self-confidence. It stands as it has stood through many a wintry blast. But at last it begins to grow old, ■ storm greater than before comes, and the oak is uprooted and falls with a terrible crash. And when the storm has passed, there it lies, fallen and ruined. It can never be replaced; its day is over. But the blades of grass which grew at the foot of the oak, when the storm beats down upon them, bow their heads to the very ground; and the next morning, when it has passed, they rise again, and in a little while no trace of injury remains upon them. The oak is the type of pride; the grass, of humility. For the humble, temptation has lost much of its power

¹ Psalm cxxi. 1, 2.

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to injure; it passes over them, leaving but little traces of its assault.

Then, too, we must remember that the humble have a special claim upon God's loving care, as S. Peter assures us when he says, "Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you."¹

There are few more comforting passages in Holy Scripture than "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." We have so many cares! How glorious, then, it must be to be able to cast them all upon God. But how are we to do it? S. Peter tells us, "Be clothed with humility;" or, as we might better translate it, "Gird yourselves with humility." And the original Greek word² is a most interesting one; it occurs only once in the New Testament, and it means to put on the distinctive garment of a slave. There is some difference of opinion among scholars in regard to what this was, some thinking it a frock or apron; others, a pair of sleeves, put on to protect the clothes when working. But all agree that it refers to a garment worn only by slaves.

We are the servants of Jesus Christ. S. Paul loves to describe himself by a word which is translated in our New Testament "servant," but really

¹ 1 S. Peter v. 5-7.

² ἐγκομβώσασθε.

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means "bond-slave"—"Paul, the bond-slave of Jesus Christ."¹ Now the distinctive livery of God's servants is humility. Gird yourselves, therefore, with humility, says S. Peter, and then you can cast all your cares upon God. It is as though he would say, God is looking down upon this world, and those who wear the garment of humility, God's own livery, are the special objects of His care. They belong to Him; He has promised to care for them. As a master provides for his servants, God provides for them, and makes their cares His own.

So we see that humility is a great help in meeting trials and temptations. It robs temptation of much of its force, and it enables us to cast our trials and cares upon God.

Lastly, we must meet our trials with cheerfulness. A spiritual writer asks, "How are we to overcome temptations?" He replies, "Cheerfulness is the first thing, cheerfulness the second, and cheerfulness the third." And he is right. Cheerfulness robs trial of much of its power to hurt us, and cheerfulness under trial is a splendid example to those around us. Some bear their trials in a spirit of self-pity. This does not make the trials any lighter, but quite spoils the merit of bearing them, and greatly injures the power of our example, and therefore our influence, with others. Who had more trials to bear than S. Paul? and who was more

¹ Cf. Romans i. 1; Titus i. 1.

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cheerful? In describing his life and sufferings, he speaks of himself "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."¹

Having now some idea of the purpose of our trials and the way to meet them, let us go on to consider more in detail the special trials of old age.

¹ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

CHAPTER VII.

The Loss of Friends.



MONG the joys and blessings of life, few rank higher than friendship, not only on account of the happy hours which we spend in the companionship of a dear friend, but still more, because of the power of a good friendship to stimulate us to noble effort, and to encourage us to persevere when our energies are flagging. We are reminded of this aspect of friendship in the Book of Proverbs, where we read, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."¹

Then again, in the time of failure, and distress, and adversity, what is more helpful and comforting than the sympathy of a trusted friend? Friends are indeed among the good gifts, among the great blessings, which God has bestowed upon us in this world. But as we grow old, one of the first trials which we experience is the gradual loss of friends by death. Those to whom we have looked up, and

¹ Prov. xxvii. 17.

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who are older than ourselves, pass away before us. Many, too, of our own age die, so that our circle of friends steadily diminishes. Not only is there the anguish of heart and sorrow at parting from those whom we have loved, but the sense of loneliness and desolation as we feel ourselves left more and more alone.

In old age, too, it is not easy to make new friends. We may make new acquaintances, but the sacred intercourse of true friendship demands years of growth, and generally needs to have its roots stretching back into the enthusiasms and affections of earlier years.

The loss of friends is one of the great trials of old age; but, like all trials, it has its disciplinary purposes, according to God's providence, and it is not difficult to see what these purposes are. It is a great agent in teaching us that lesson of detachment from the things of earth, which it is so difficult, and yet so important, for us to learn. It brings home to us the truth that we are strangers and pilgrims here,¹ that we have no continuing city, but seek one to come.²

This lesson of detachment God is ever striving to teach His children. We see this in the institution of one of the great feasts of the Jewish Church —the Feast of Tabernacles. It was observed from the fifteenth to the twenty-second of Tisri, the seventh month, and marked the completion of the

¹ Cf. 1 S. Peter ii. 11.

² Cf. Heb. xiii. 14.

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harvest of fruit, oil, and wine. But historically it commemorated the wanderings in the wilderness, for which purpose the Israelites were required to leave their houses and to dwell in booths which they had made of the boughs of trees.¹ This annual breaking up of home life, and returning, though only for a brief period, to the condition of their ancestors as wanderers on earth, was to teach them the great lesson of detachment from their possessions.

We have no Feast of Tabernacles; but God, through the workings of His providence, is ever striving to teach us this lesson. The first effort of detachment is generally made in childhood, when we leave home for school. How dreadful it seemed to our childish hearts to leave those we loved and to go out into a new world, peopled with children like ourselves, but all strange to us.

The years of childhood pass, and the time for leaving school arrives, and brings with it another lesson of detachment—the breaking up of innocent friendships we formed at school, and the going out once more into a new world, perhaps to the University, where the same course of discipline is endured, even stronger friendships made, many of them—perhaps most of them—only to be broken, when we leave college and take up our life's work in the great world.

¹ Cf. Levit. xxiii. 39-44.

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Then again, in family life, how often this lesson is taught us, as one after another of those we love is taken from us by death—father, mother, sisters, brothers—each wound to our affections impressing upon us the truth that we are but strangers and pilgrims here, that this world is not our home.

Yet again, in married life the lesson is taught us, in the loss of children, either by death or by the forming of new ties through marriage, which take them away from us! Indeed, all through our lives we are constantly called upon to surrender our heart's most cherished possessions, in order that we may learn to lay up our treasures, not on earth, but in heaven, for, as our Lord tells us, “Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.”¹

Gradually and tenderly does the Gardener loosen the roots which we have put forth into the earth of this world, in preparation for transplanting us to a better world than this. One by one in this life He takes away the treasures upon which we have set our heart, in order that we may set our heart upon the treasures laid up for us in heaven!

The temptation at such times of desolation and loneliness is to try to solace ourselves with other interests of this life, instead of waiting patiently in our loneliness for the happy call to come which shall detach us altogether from the Church militant

¹ Cf. S. Matt: vi. 21.

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here on earth, and attach us to the Church in the world beyond.

The loss of friends, as old age draws on, should throw us more upon the friendship of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we cannot have the sweet sympathy of dear ones who entered into all our hopes and fears, our successes and failures, we can have the still greater sympathy of Him Who said, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you."¹ As we grow older, we should grow nearer to Him, entering more into what He is doing with us and for us, recognising more clearly His loving hand in all the disciplines of life; hearing more distinctly His voice, teaching us of that home where He has gone to prepare a place for us, of that Father, in Whose house are many mansions, into which He waits to welcome us with the loving greeting, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."²

¹ S. John xv. 15.

² S. Matt. xxv. 34.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Loss of the Power of Work.

N our last chapter we considered one of the methods employed by God to teach us detachment from the things of this world—the loss of friends. As one friend after another passes out of our life and goes before us into the great future, we must surely feel a loosening of the ties which bind us to this world, as well as a call to prepare ourselves to follow those who have gone before. There are, however, other ways by which God strives to bring home to us this important lesson, and among them is that loss of power of work which sooner or later comes to those who have attained to old age. The work which we loved so dearly, and perhaps did so well, the work which has been the great interest of our lives, has gradually to be given up—not all at once, but step by step—one thing after another has to be surrendered, as the infirmities of old age steal upon us.

There is, first, the pain of recognising, by

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numberless little signs, that others think us unequal to our task. And then comes the deeper pain of realising ourselves that this is true—that our hand is losing its skill, our eye its quickness, our intellect its keenness, our will its promptness to act; that we cannot hold our own in the race of life, that we must fall out, and yield our place to another.

Then, when we have done this, there is the added trial of seeing great alterations made in our methods of work, new-fangled ideas introduced, until the work we used to do is done so differently, that we hardly recognise it. Moreover, after the work has passed out of our hands, we have to learn that the world can do without us—indeed, perhaps it thinks it does better without us—that newer methods and younger men accomplish more than we did.

This is one of the trials of old age, one which we have to face, and, if we are wise and humble, to turn to good account. Like all trials, it is sent to test us. On the one hand, as we have seen, it is to teach us the great lesson of detachment from the things of earth. On the other hand, Satan will try to use it to our injury, to make us discontented and unhappy in surrendering the work which has engrossed perhaps the greater part of our life.

If we analyze our feelings we shall probably be able to trace the spirit of discontent and

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unhappiness to a subtle pride, which resents the necessity of taking an inferior position. The best way to meet this pride is, of course, to cultivate that spirit of humility which is proof against such temptations. But besides this, it may be well for us to remind ourselves that all the gifts, intellectual and physical, which we have used to good effect in our lifetime, have been God's gifts, and that when God withdraws them, as a great spiritual writer, Blosius, tells us, it is to teach us to rest more in the Giver, God. It is quite possible for God's gifts to come between Him and the soul. There is a striking passage in the Prophet Habakkuk which warns us against this—"They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag."¹ God bestows upon us gifts and opportunities, and we must realise always that they are from God. We must be on our guard against the temptation to sacrifice unto our net and burn incense unto our drag, to over-estimate the importance of our gifts and opportunities.

S. James tells us, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights."² The gift is from God; but we must not worship the gift, but the Giver. And sometimes, when we are leaning too much upon the gift, it is taken away, in order that we may lean more upon the Giver. This is so in old age, when opportunities and gifts are withdrawn,

¹ Hab. i. 16.

² S. James i. 17.

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in order that we may rest entirely upon Him from Whom they came, our Father in heaven.

At such times it is helpful to dwell with gratitude upon the work which God has allowed us to do for Him in the past. In the busy rush of life and the enthusiasm of success we never thanked Him enough for using us ~~as~~ instruments in accomplishing His work in the world, for the opportunities which He put in our path to work or to suffer for Him. And now in old age, when work days are nearly over, and we have abundant leisure to dream over the past, our dreams should be thankful dreams for all that in His gracious providence He permitted us to do for Him. In order that we may turn these trials to good account, we need frankly and fully to recognise, and lovingly to accept, all the limitations and infirmities of old age—not as though they were unseasonable and intolerable, but as the expected and ordinary accompaniments of that state of life to which, by God's mercy, we have attained.

We have lived long, and enjoyed many blessings and privileges; and now, before we lay down to rest for that short night which intervenes before the eternal day dawns, we have to prepare ourselves by stripping off, one by one, the garments which we have so long worn—nay, God in His loving-kindness takes them from us, and we have

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only to yield them as He asks for them, knowing that in the life beyond we shall be clothed with gifts and powers of glory greater than any we possessed here!

CHAPTER IX.

The Loss of Our Independence.

N addition to the lessons of detachment taught us by the loss of friends and by the loss of the power of work, one of the moral trials of old age, as distinguished from its physical trials, is the loss of our independence. Most people pride themselves on their independence and self-sufficiency. But when old age comes, we have, perforce, to rely upon others to help us in many ways, and therefore we have to part with what we have loved so dearly—our independence. For some this is a great trial. But does not God by it purpose to teach us an important lesson, which we need to learn before we enter His presence?

Is independence always a virtue? Nay, more, is it not often a sin? Let us investigate it. Man is a social being, and his relations to society are such that he is really dependent upon others for almost everything in life. As a child, he is dependent upon his parents for food and education; as a man, he is more or less dependent upon

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those who have gone before him for the rich stores of knowledge and experience upon which he draws so freely, and yet often with so little sense of his obligations to them. Then, not only in his studies, but in his work, he is largely dependent upon those with whom he works and for whom he works, the latter supplying him with the means of working, the former aiding him in his work, by doing, perhaps, parts which are subordinate, but absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of the work, parts which, perhaps, he could not do himself.

The more we investigate, the more we shall probably find how dependent we are upon our fellow-men in every department of life. The happiness of a home is impossible without others upon whom we depend for much of its joys. And wherever we look we shall find human lives interlacing in a wonderful manner, and so intimately, that there is little room left for any real independence. Indeed, the independence upon which men pride themselves is too often only an assertion of self-will and pride, which brings pain to others and feeds their own self-love.

But if we are so dependent upon our fellow-men, how much more is this the case with regard to God! How absolutely we depend upon Him, and, as a rule, how little we realise it! All that we are, and all that we have, comes from Him. Not only is life His gift, but the preservation of

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life, and the enjoyment of all that makes life happy, or even durable. In our independence we attribute our success to our own talents, or judgment, or perseverance. We forget that God gave us those talents and judgment, that power to persevere—and more, that He put the opportunities in our way which we have used to our own advantage.

And yet God is always trying to teach us our dependence upon Him. To take but one example: when He gave us the gift of life, He conditioned that gift upon the use of food—man must eat in order that he may live. We cannot go a day without food, without suffering discomfort; we cannot go many days, without forfeiting life. And what is the lesson taught us by this daily necessity of eating? Surely, that we are not independent; that we cannot do as we please; that we must work for our food, and must eat that we may live. The practice of saying Grace before and after meals is a witness to our dependence upon God, and therefore our gratitude for His good gifts.

Our Lord teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount, that our true happiness consists in the realisation of this law of dependence upon God for all things; for He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”¹ The word “blessed”² means really “happy,” and

¹ S. Matt. v. 3. ² μακάριος.

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the word translated "poor" means "those who are dependent." By "poor" we generally mean people who have but little; but the Greek word¹ here signifies "beggars," those who have nothing, and live upon the alms which others give them.

So that our Lord is teaching us that true happiness in our life consists, not in asserting our independence, but in cultivating a spirit of dependence upon God. For, as the beggar depends upon the alms of the charitable for his daily bread, so do we depend upon the love of God for everything in our life. And instead of resenting this sense of dependence, we ought to rejoice in it; since as Christ says, those who recognise it are indeed happy: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

A child is not oppressed by a sense of his dependence upon his father and mother. On the contrary, he knows their love for him, and lives in joyous dependence upon that love. He goes to them with his needs and troubles, certain of their sympathy and readiness to help him. A child who desires to be independent of his father and mother is a monstrosity, and spoils the happiness of his home. But we are God's children, and should find our happiness in the joyous sense of our dependence upon God for everything. So we are taught to say daily in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." And by that

¹ πτωχοί.

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daily bread we signify all things we need both for body and soul.

When we ask God to give us our daily bread, we surely mean something more than that His providence will enable us to make a living in this world. Our Lord reminds us that, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."¹ We have to think not only of the food of the body, but of the mind and of the soul. And the food of the mind and of the soul, in its highest sense, is the Word of God. The written Word is the food of the mind, the Incarnate Word in the Holy Communion is the great food of the soul.

There are, of course, other things on which the mind and the soul feed besides these; but we need to be careful to take all these things from the hand of God, and to look askance at the food which the world offers us. Too often it is unwholesome, sometimes absolutely poisonous. The literature, for instance, of the day floods the mind with the knowledge of evil rather than of good, and the love of money hardens the soul, and gives it a distaste for the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. But it is the spirit of independence which leads people in our days to think that they must read everything and know everything, both good and evil, and that they must do as others do in the world. So they take their food from the world's

¹ S. Matt. iv. 4.

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hand, not from God's, and too often they find it poisoned.

Happy are the poor in spirit, who recognise the joy of depending upon God for all things, of taking all things from His hand—food for body, and soul, and mind—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Our true relation to God is indeed one of dependence; and surely it is fitting that before we pass into His presence we should give up our independence, and from our dependence upon others learn more perfectly the lesson which it is so difficult to learn—that happiness does not consist in self-assertion, but in humility; that man was not made to stand alone, but to help and to be helped by his fellow-men.

The loss of our independence is one of the trials of old age, but, like most trials, it is a blessing in disguise, teaching us a truth which we learn but imperfectly here, but which we shall realise fully in the Body of Christ in heaven, where there will be no independence, but every member will share in every other member's joy, and minister to every other member's need. And it will be, not the selfish interest of the individual, but the good and happiness of the whole body, which will be the rule of our life in heaven.

CHAPTER X.

Infirmities of Body.

NOT only does old age bring with it moral trials in the loss of friends, in waning powers of work, and in the surrender of our independence, but there are physical trials which follow in its train, in the increasing weakness of body, the impairment often of sight and hearing, and sometimes in the sharp pains of rheumatism and gout. Let us take these in order, and, first, the infirmities of the body.

This body of ours has been our companion all our life. Its demands have engrossed our attention, its ailments have given us much trouble. It was intended to be our obedient servant, but it has often become our master. And as old age comes on it begins to wear out. The old servant can no longer do his accustomed work, the master becomes more exacting in his demands, an increasing pain and weakness obtrude themselves more and more upon our consideration. The house in which the soul has dwelt so long gradually falls

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into dilapidation and decay, warning us that the time is approaching when its tenant must leave it. We become more or less a prisoner much of the time, having to regard the weather, and our own inability to walk much without fatigue. Even our writing is no longer as firm as it used to be; the hand which holds the pen strives to follow the rapid thoughts, but the shaky character of the writing tells of the difficulty with which the letters have been traced.

Is not this gradual withdrawal of strength intended, like the other trials we have considered, to teach us to prepare ourselves for our departure, to lead us to set our thoughts more on that house prepared for us in the heavens, of which S. Paul tells us, when he says, "We know that if our earthly tabernacle-dwelling be dissolved, we have ■ building from God, ■ dwelling not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."¹ S. Paul likens this early frame of ours to a tent-dwelling, used for the necessities of our pilgrimage here, but which is to give place to a far more glorious abode when we are clothed upon with the transformed body of our resurrection life.

The growing weakness of our earthly body reminds us with steady insistence that we ought to be looking forward to the day when that weakness will have passed away, and we shall possess a body free from infirmities, which no longer

¹ ■ Cor. v. 1.

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dominates our higher nature, but is its most obedient servant. It may be helpful to us, in bearing with our physical infirmities, often to meditate on the glories of the risen body, and to contrast them with that body which has given us, and is giving us, so much trouble in this life.

In the Athanasian Creed we profess our belief that when our Lord comes to judge the world, "All men shall rise again with their bodies." But what sort of bodies will they be? Let us examine what Holy Scripture tells us about this, and examine it in the light of the theological teaching of the Church.

S. Paul tells us of our body, that "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural [or soul-] body; it is raised a spiritual body."¹

In this passage we have revealed four of the properties of the risen body, as contrasted with our bodies in their present condition. These four are said to be Impassibility, Subtlety, Agility, and Clarity. These, of course, are technical, theological terms, but they are intended to express in four words what theologians have conceived S. Paul to mean by the four clauses of the sentence in which he describes the properties of the resurrection body. He says, first, "It is sown in corruption; it is

¹ ■ Cor. xv. 42-44.

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raised in incorruption." This corresponds with the first term, "Impassibility," which implies not only freedom from death, but from all pain and suffering. In this life our bodies are in a state of continual change, the change of corruption. The tissues need to be constantly renewed through the food which is supplied to them by the processes of digestion. Every effort involves the using up of muscular tissue, every breath tells of the combustion which is going on within us, a burning up of tissues to supply us with heat. And then, besides this, the body is liable to the ravages of disease and to the results of accident, which sooner or later lead to death. In heaven it will be impassible; for, as Revelation tells us, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."¹

In this life our bodies gave us much trouble to provide them with food and clothing, and we had to refresh them when weary with sleep. But in the resurrection we shall be "as the angels of God in heaven,"² freed from the necessities of food and drink; and we know, too, that there "they rest not day and night."³

The next endowment of the resurrection body is "Subtlety." It is that quality by which bodies

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

² Cf. S. Matt. xxii. 30.

³ Rev. iv. 8.

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which are glorified are enabled to penetrate other bodies, without injury either to themselves or to those bodies through which they pass. This attribute does not arise from absence of dimensions or extension in the glorified body, but rather from the fact that these properties are so suspended that it is able to penetrate other bodies. Thus we find our Lord appearing in the upper chamber at Jerusalem on Easter Day, when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews. And we know that He rose from the dead before the stone was rolled away from the tomb. This attribute has been deduced from S. Paul's words, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." The word translated "natural" is the exact equivalent of our word "psychical," and implies a body which is dominated by the lower or animal nature.

We know this to be the case with our bodies in their present form of existence—that they are by no means obedient to the dictates of reason, but constantly put forth in opposition the appetites of the lower nature, and by them often dominate the will. We eat and drink more than is good for us, and things which are injurious to us, because they give pleasure to the palate. We indulge the body more than is necessary in sleep, and we are constantly yielding to the sin of sloth at its solicitation. The resurrection body will be free from all these infirmities and sins, because it will be a spiritual body, as S. Paul tells us; that is,

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one which is entirely dominated by the spiritual part of man—his reasonable soul. As we have noticed, the body which is given us for ■ servant often becomes the master. Through its appetites it gradually subjugates and enslaves the higher nature. But when it has risen to the life of glory it will be so absolutely under the dominion of spirit that it will possess that attribute of spirit which enables it, as we have noticed, to penetrate other bodies.

The third property of the resurrection body is “Agility,” an endowment by which it is able to transfer itself from place to place with the swiftness of thought, at the will of the soul, which property is inferred from S. Paul’s words, “It is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power.” Now, in thought, the soul can pass from place to place with the utmost swiftness. But the soul cannot carry the body along with it, and the movement of the body is slow and difficult on account of its weakness. But S. Paul tells us it will be “raised in power”; and that power has been thought to imply that the body will be so obedient to all the motions and actions of the soul, that it will pass from place to place with the swiftness of thought.

The last attribute of the risen body is “Clarity, or Brightness.” This is a property of the bodies of the righteous, which causes them to shine with the glory and beauty of heaven, of which the apostles had a glimpse when our Lord was trans-

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figured ; for then, we are told, " His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white ~~as~~ the light."¹ To this property of the risen body S. Paul refers in the words, " It is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory." And Christ expressly foretells this in the parable of the tares, when He says, " Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."² And this brightness theologians think will be caused by the overflow of the glory of the soul upon the body, which will be entirely subject to and dominated by the higher soul or spirit of man ; for it will be raised, as S. Paul says, " a spiritual body."

The infirmities of old age, then, should surely teach us to turn our thoughts to that glorified body which shall be ours in eternity, the same body which we have borne on earth, but freed from weakness and sin. This thought should help us to bear with patience the increasing weakness of old age, realising that soon the natural body will be sown in corruption, to be raised in incorruption, and power, and glory.

¹ S. Matt. xvii. 2.

² S. Matt. xiii. 43.

CHAPTER XI.

The Loss of Sight.

NE of the frequent accompaniments of old age is the impairment of sight. And this brings with it the deprivation of various occupations and pleasures, leaving us with many weary hours upon our hands. Not only are we deprived of the solace of reading, but often of occupying our time with mechanical work. This is a very great trial, and brings in its train certain temptations.

If sight be to any great extent impaired, what do we lose? The enjoyment of physical beauty in this world; and first, the beauties of nature. We can no longer drink in the entrancing loveliness of some exquisite landscape, lighted up by the glorious splendours of the setting sun! We can no longer enjoy the beauties of form and colour as manifested in the delicate shape and colouring of flowers. Then pictures and works of art can no more minister to our pleasure. But what is worse by far is that we are shut out from intercourse with a whole world of friends—that world

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of friends with whom we hold communication through books ; for in books are stored the thoughts of others, thoughts which we can make our own by reading. And to be deprived of the power of reading is to lose one of the great resources of old age,

Then again, the loss of occupation, involved in inability to read or work, brings with it its own temptations—temptations to idle thoughts ; and worse, perhaps, to discontented thoughts, and a great weariness, as the long hours of the day drag on. Let us consider what antidotes we can find for these temptations.

In a spirit of penitence we might reflect on those periods of our life which we passed in spiritual blindness, seeing nothing, or seeing but dimly the things which belong to our soul's health. When we were blind to the glories of heaven, to the revelation of God ; blind, perhaps, because we were so much taken up by the beauties of earth, by the fair scenes which enchanted our earthly eyes. How little this spiritual blindness troubled us, how little we realised what we lost by it ! We were content to gaze upon the things of this passing world, so interested in them that we gave but little thought to those verities of the soul's life which are not transient, but eternal ! ■ Now, things are reversed, and God's hand is drawn over our earthly vision, that it may no longer distract us from the more important visions of eternity. This is the antidote

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—to throw ourselves with such eagerness into the contemplation of truths divinely revealed, that we may live in a vision of heaven, which shall more than compensate for the loss of the visions of earth! Earthly beauties have faded away, in order that we may have greater opportunity, and perhaps, therefore, greater power, to occupy ourselves by gazing upon the things of eternity!

As night steals on us it shuts from our views this earth upon which we dwell; but it opens to our gaze other worlds of which we could have no knowledge if it were not for the darkness of night; for we can only see the stars when it is dark. So, sometimes, the eyes of the body must be closed, to enable the eyes of the soul to see more clearly.

There is, in a mediæval writer, a beautiful legend of a blind man, who, on the occasion of the translation of the relics of S. Vedast, prayed for the restoration of his sight. His prayer was heard, and he saw the beauties of earth, the faces of his friends. But his mind was so filled with thoughts of the new world of sight thus opened to him, that he found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts as before on the things of God in prayer and meditation. He suffered a thousand distractions; and finally, humbly prayed that, if God knew it to be better for the health of his soul that he should be made blind—better, in order that, freed from the distractions of earth, he might fix his thoughts on the things of heaven—God would take

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away again the gift of sight. Immediately he became blind once more, and spent the remainder of his life with great resignation in the contemplation of Him Who is the Eternal Light! The legend, whether true or not, teaches a great truth—that the gift of spiritual sight is greater than that of natural sight; that to be able to gaze upon the things of heaven is worth more than to be able to see the beauties of earth. So, conversely, spiritual blindness is more to be dreaded, more to be pitied, than physical blindness, than which, alas! it is so much more common.

The loss of sight throws us more upon ourselves, perhaps, than the loss of any other faculty. If we have lost our hearing, we can still read, and reading takes us out of ourselves, and introduces us to the great world of authors, with whom, so to speak, we converse. But, after all, is it not true that what we are to take into eternity is only ourselves? We shall find there, of course, new interests, in the communion of saints, in uninterrupted friendship with the holy angels, in ceaseless and tireless service of God. But we only carry into that world ourselves. Is it not, therefore, well, that as we stand upon the threshold of that new life, we should learn something of our own resources apart from the extraneous interests of earth? And this we are gradually taught by the loss of sight. We are thrown upon ourselves: And we spend our time either in the indulgence of idle and complaining

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thoughts, or in the lifting of our souls to God in prayer, in praise, and thanksgiving; either in looking back and dreaming over episodes in our past life, or in looking forward to and seeing visions of the glory which awaits us in the kingdom beyond!

At such times it will be helpful if we can commit to memory parts of the Psalter, such as the opening verses of the 62nd and 63rd Psalms: "My soul truly waiteth still upon God: for of Him cometh my salvation. He verily is my strength and my salvation: He is my defence, so that I shall not greatly fall. . . . Nevertheless, my soul, wait thou still upon God: for my hope is in Him. He truly is my strength and my salvation: He is my defence, so that I shall not fall. In God is my health, and my glory: the rock of my might, and in God is my trust. O put your trust in Him alway, ye people: pour out your hearts before Him, for God is our hope."¹ "O God, thou art my God: early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee: in a barren and dry land, where no water is. Thus have I looked for Thee in holiness: that I might behold Thy power and glory. For Thy loving-kindness is better than the life itself: my lips shall praise Thee. As long as I live will I magnify Thee on this manner: and lift up my hands in Thy Name. My soul shall be satisfied, even as it were with marrow and fatness; when my mouth praiseth

¹ Psalm lxii. 1-2, 5-8.

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Thee with joyful lips. Have I not remembered
Thee in my bed, and thought upon Thee when I
was waking? Because Thou hast been my helper:
therefore under the shadow of Thy wings will I
rejoice. My soul hangeth upon Thee; Thy right
hand hath upholden me.”¹

¹ Psalm lxiii. 1-6.

CHAPTER XII.

Deafness.



NOTHER trial which is often attendant on old age is the loss of hearing—to a greater or less degree. This results in a most serious deprivation; for by it we are more or less cut off from intercourse with those around us. If our hearing is only impaired, and not entirely lost, it still may render us unable to join in a general conversation. But if the infirmity be greater, it may cut us off almost entirely from free communication with the outer world. This trial brings with it temptations to impatience, irritability, and discontent with our lot. In some it arouses an unworthy spirit of suspicion, that others are talking about us, and do not wish us to hear what they are saying. It is a most serious cross, but it must be borne, like all other crosses, with such patience and submission to the will of God that it may win for us the reward of a crown!

As in our last chapter we considered loss of sight in bringing home to us our neglect to

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exercise the eyes of the soul upon the revelation of God, so may we consider deafness as an opportunity of expiating the many sins of spiritual deafness in our past life. The sense of hearing was given us that we might have free intercourse, through speech, with our fellow-men. But the soul has a spiritual organ by which it is privileged to hear God's voice; and the ear teaches the tongue, so that, hearing God speak, it replies to His voice through prayer and meditation, and thus enjoys free intercourse and close communion with God.

But, as we look back over our past lives, we probably become sadly conscious of periods when we were spiritually deaf. It was not that God did not speak to us, but, rather, that we were so engrossed in listening to the many voices of the world, that we did not recognise His voice, that "still small voice"¹ by which God speaks to the soul. And the effect of our spiritual deafness was that we became spiritually dumb, or, at best, but stammering, in the prayers and utterances we addressed to God. And now that we are shut off, to a great extent, from intercourse with the world around us, we have a great opportunity of cultivating our spiritual hearing, of listening for God's voice, and of speaking to Him in prayer and in praise.

There is one of our Blessed Lord's miracles on

¹ Cf. I Kings xix. 12.

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which the deaf may meditate with very great advantage—the healing of the deaf man, with an impediment in his speech, at Decapolis.¹ It is one of the two miracles peculiar to S. Mark, the other being the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida.²

In connection with this healing of the deaf man we may observe certain circumstances—that it seems to have been attended with considerable difficulty, and that there was something peculiarly distressing in the condition of the deaf man which especially appealed to our Lord's compassion; for we are told that Christ sighed, or rather, as it should be translated, that He groaned.³ To us this man's condition may seem to have been less pitiable than that of the lepers or the demoniacs whom Christ healed. But there appears to have been something peculiarly sad in the man's state which drew forth the groan from our Lord, and which is, perhaps, witnessed to by the many stages of the healing. Perhaps it was because the deaf man's condition was typical of one of the commonest spiritual ailments, and of the loss which it involves to the soul.

The man was deaf, we are told, and had an impediment in his speech. The word implies that he stammered, or spoke with difficulty. And this may have been caused by his deafness; for it

¹ S. Mark vii. 32-37.

² S. Mark viii. 22-27.

³ *εστίνακτος.*

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not infrequently happens that, with the entire loss of hearing, there is a partial loss of speech. A deaf man cannot hear what he is saying, and so comes to speak indistinctly, and sometimes ends by scarcely speaking at all. Not hearing his own voice, he forgets how to produce sounds which he can no longer hear.

The same phenomena may be traced in the spiritual disease. When the ear of the soul is trained to hear God's voice, the tongue of the soul finds no difficulty in prayer and praise. This intercourse or conversation with God is the soul's greatest joy. The ear listens, and the tongue replies. God's voice is a living voice, always speaking ; and if we are always listening, the spiritual ear becomes more acute, until the slightest whispers of that voice are apprehended.

But this listening for God's voice implies ■ stillness in our soul. If we are listening to all the voices of the world, their clamour not only drowns the voice of God, but so blunts the spiritual ear that it becomes incapable of hearing. A person who works in a boiler factory becomes insensible to all but very loud sounds ; and one who lives amid the constant din of the world's cries is in danger of losing the faculty of hearing God's voice. And the result of this spiritual deafness is a general inability to pray. Because we do not hear God speaking to us, it is difficult to realise that we are speaking to Him

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—our prayers seem to go out into space, not to the Throne of Grace. And after awhile they become more and more cold and unreal.

In the miracle we may observe that, while the man was deaf, he was not entirely dumb—he spoke with difficulty. So the loss of spiritual hearing does not involve complete loss of the power of prayer—only we pray with difficulty. This may have been the reason of our Lord's compassionate groan—that He realised how common was the spiritual ailment, and how much the soul lost by it; how much of the joys of spiritual life, not to speak of the constant guidance of God's voice. The disease is common; its cure is difficult, and requires time. And what is the first step towards healing? To be removed from the clamour of the world. Our Lord, we are told, took the man aside from the multitude privately. Nothing can be done as long as the cause of the disease continues. If the spiritual ear is to be trained anew, the voices of the world, for a time at least, must be silenced.

But is not this what God purposes to effect by the deafness of old age, shutting us out from intercourse with the world? In the silence which is thus made, God will train the ear of the soul to hear His voice with a distinctness and fulness, perhaps never before known. And then, as the spiritual hearing is restored, the power of prayer is increased. Prayer is not the mere utterance of

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words to a far-off Deity but it is the response of our soul to the voice of God speaking to us. Prayer thus becomes a joy, a joy of conversation and communion with God.

The next stage in the healing which we observe is the use of means. Christ put His fingers into the deaf man's ears, and spat, and touched his tongue. The touch tells us of the Incarnation, the mystery by which God touches man. The use of the spittle speaks of the outward signs of the Sacraments, by which the grace of the Incarnation and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is conveyed to the individual soul. We must not, therefore, be content with the training of the ear and tongue in meditation and prayer, but we must use the Sacraments, we must feed upon our Lord in the Holy Communion, that our healing may be made perfect.

To sum up, then, may we not consider our deafness as ■ opportunity, on the one hand, of expiating our neglect of prayer and meditation in the past ; and on the other, of cultivating faculties of spiritual hearing and speech, of learning to recognise God's voice, and to speak to God in prayer? Soon we hope to be with God in the kingdom of His love. Must we not, therefore, use to the utmost the time given us to learn now the language in which we are to hold communion with God throughout eternity? This thought should not only make us accept the

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great trial of deafness with patience and cheerfulness, but should spur us on to use the opportunity it affords to prepare ourselves for the life which awaits us in heaven.

CHAPTER XIII.

Pain.

OF all the various mysteries of life, that which meets us most often (if, perhaps, we except sin), is the mystery of suffering. Sin is a universal fact in human life, but suffering is still wider-reaching, since beneath its sceptre not only man, but all creation, bows. For, as S. Paul says, "The whole creation [every creature] groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also."¹

Pain, too, belongs to man more or less in every stage of his life, as the result of accident, disease, and often of sin. But we are concerned now especially with those pains which are frequently the accompaniment of old age, especially the acute pains of rheumatism and gout. It is no uncommon experience to the aged to suffer most intensely from these ailments. It may help us not only to bear them with greater fortitude, but with greater contentment, if we reflect upon the purpose

¹ Rom. viii. 22, 23.

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of pain as it is revealed to us both in God's Word and in the experiences of life.

It must be evident to everyone who investigates the matter that in physical life pain plays a most important and a most beneficent part. In fact, it is scarcely too much to say that the two guides of physical life are pleasure and pain. The first, acting as an incentive, moves man to those acts and urges him in those paths by which physical life is unfolded and developed; while the second, acting as a curb, restrains man from straying into paths of danger and destruction. Indeed, in physical life pain is almost the only safeguard man has to prevent him from losing life itself in the pursuit of pleasure. We see this best, perhaps, in the matter of health. Pain, as sentinel, warns man of the beginnings of internal ailments which, if not checked, might become fatal. The physician has to diagnose a case of sickness largely by the character and location of pain as described by the patient. And we are held back from many external dangers by the suffering which they would probably involve.

Without pursuing this point further, we may assert that pain is man's best friend, warning him of many a pitfall, preventing many an irretrievable mistake, remedying many an evil—in a word, that the purpose of pain is altogether benevolent.

The origin of suffering is a question of absorbing interest, but one which is steeped in

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impenetrable mystery; for, with the exception of telling us that death came into the world by sin, revelation is silent concerning the origin of suffering. That it is often caused *directly* by sin, is certain. That in some mysterious way it is always related *indirectly* to sin, is probable. And yet nothing would be more untrue than to say that an individual's suffering can always be traced to the same individual's sin.

In investigating the mystery of pain we must bear in mind that the question from man's point of view is the relation of suffering to human life, in the development of man's moral being and character, *in the presence and under the influence of sin*. Whether there would be any suffering in the world if there were no sin, is a matter which we have not here to consider. In another world, whence all sin will be shut out, we are distinctly told that there will be no more pain. But in this life suffering is a most potent factor in the development of man's moral nature in an atmosphere of sin; and, so far as we are able to judge, there is no other means by which the same beneficent result may be accomplished in the development of what is good in man, and in the conquest of all that is evil.

Sin has been most generally defined as disobedience, or transgression of the law. Suffering, then, is the penalty of this transgression or sin; and not only a penalty, but it is almost always

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intended to be an antidote—to be preventive of transgression in the future, and remedial for that of the past. That pain is preventive of transgression in the future, is too self-evident to need much proof. If certain food of which we are very fond invariably results in a severe attack of indigestion, or in some other disagreeable consequences, the pain we suffer warns us that this particular food does not agree with us, and prevents us from indulging in it, however much we may desire it. It may be difficult to show that *physical* pain is remedial for the transgressions of the past, but it is quite certain that *mental* pain is; for it is the mental or moral pain which we experience in regard to past transgressions, which leads us to penitence with all its glorious fruits of God's forgiveness and our own amendment.

Pain, too, is often *punitive*. It is a punishment for misdoing. And this punishment is not so much vindictive as vindicative, in that it is the manifestation of God's justice in the presence of moral evil. Suffering has been considered by some unfortunate people, who have not the knowledge of God, as an evidence of God's injustice and cruelty. The very opposite is the truth; for God being what He is, absolute Righteousness, Justice, and Truth, it is impossible that He can do otherwise than manifest His justice wherever sin comes into His presence. For God's attributes are His Essence; they

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cannot be laid aside at times, as in the case of the attributes of man. God's justice, therefore, is no mere transient feeling, but a permanent and necessary hostility towards that sin which is so infinitely abhorrent to His divine nature.

Suffering, too, is *evidential*, in revealing to us that aspect of God's love which we call the love of compassion; for our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. How little could we ever have known of this love of compassion, if it had not been for the sufferings of our Lord upon the Cross! And S. Peter tells us¹ that in those sufferings He leaves us an example; thus calling us to practise that sympathy with others in suffering which has such enormous power to develop what is good in our own souls; for while it lightens the sorrows of others, it through sympathy makes us godlike. Sympathy takes us out of ourselves, teaching us to be unselfish; brings sunshine into the clouded hearts of our fellow-men; makes us the ministers of love; and enables us, by bearing one another's burdens, to fulfil the law of Christ.²

Again, suffering is *evidential*, in revealing God as man's only Refuge in time of trouble. Suffering has a twofold effect upon man, as we learn on Calvary itself. It mellows, and develops, and purifies, and leads him to God, as in the case of

¹ Cf. S. Peter ii. 21-25.

² Cf. Gal. vi. 2.

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the penitent robber, who, by the experience of his own great pains, and by witnessing the sufferings of our Lord, was driven to God in penitence, and emboldened to pray, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."¹ Or, on the other hand, suffering hardens and embitters, and drives man into rebellion and despair, as we see in the case of the impenitent robber. Both malefactors endured the same pains, and had before them in our Blessed Lord the same example of patient suffering. But they bore their pains in a different spirit; and in one, pain worked penitence; in the other, blasphemy and despair.

There are many who have never thought of God in the days of health and prosperity, who have been brought to God by suffering, and who can say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble: that I may learn Thy statutes."² To unbelievers the vicarious sufferings of Christ has ever been a stumbling-block, something irreconcilable with the unbeliever's view of justice. And yet, is not the Passion which redeemed the world rather the climax of that method of operation to which may be traced all the progress of humanity? A man's sorrows, not his joys, are the seed, both of glory in the life to come, and of the many blessings to humanity in the life on earth. When we try to trace the fruit which has sprung from the legacies of pleasure

¹ Cf. S. Luke xxiii. 39-44.

² Psalm cxix. 71.

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and joy left to us by the individuals of the race, how little do we find? Pleasure and joy seem to be a seed which is sterile and unproductive. All the abundant fruit of the experience of centuries has sprung from seed sown in tears—the seed of labour, and sorrow, and pain.

“Man learns wisdom by experience,” says the proverb; but it implies *bitter* experience. And so our Lord’s last act of self-sacrifice, by which He made satisfaction for the sins of the world, and won for man eternal life, was surely the splendid climax to which all that was great and unselfish in the history of the race had been pointing.

Man comes into the world through the travail of another. The life which was brought forth with such pain is largely supported by food gained by the death of many a creature. The comforts and even the necessities of life are purchased for us at the price of the labour, and often of the suffering, of numbers of our fellow-men. Indeed, all that makes life worth living—liberty, law, art, literature—all is inherited from others, who won it through toil and suffering, through disappointment, and often through death.¹

Vicarious suffering, then, seems to be the law of human progress, pointing to the solidarity of the race, and enforcing the lesson of unselfish labour and suffering for others. Was it not fitting, then,

¹ Cf. “The Problem of Pain,” in “*Lux Mundi*,” by the Rev. J. R. Illingworth.

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that He Who was the Head and Representative of humanity should gather up in His life those marvellous sorrows and pains, by which He showed the evil and broke the power of sin, by which He manifested the mercy and proved the love of God for sinners?

An important practical lesson follows from this, namely, the value of pain in our lives as one of the gifts for which we must give an account, and which we are in great danger of wasting. When we read the parable of the steward who had wasted his lord's goods, we all feel most keenly that in many ways it represents our own case. Conscience reproaches us in regard to wasted time, wasted opportunities, wasted talents; but few of us ever examine ourselves about wasted suffering.

Our Lord tells us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven—good works done, and sufferings endured, in reliance upon and through the power of His grace. Suffering is our lot in this world; we cannot escape it; but we can either transmute it into the gold of God's kingdom in heaven, by bearing it in the power of grace, and offering it in conscious union with the sufferings of Christ, or we can waste it through sheer thoughtlessness. The pain will be just as severe, but the result in eternity altogether different.

It is often helpful, when in great pain, to look upon a crucifix or a picture of the Crucifixion, and to reflect upon S. Paul's words, "I am crucified

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with Christ."¹ The power in which we are to bear pain is union with our Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross, union with His Passion. Pain is part of our crucifixion, one of the means by which we are being crucified with Christ; and in old age pain is perhaps the last opportunity of being crucified with Christ. How precious such an opportunity must be! How carefully it ought to be used, lest we should endure the pain, but lose the reward, because we have not endured it aright!

¹ Gal. ii. 20.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Faults of Old Age.

Covetousness.

LD age has not only its own special trials, but its own peculiar temptations, its own special faults. It will be wise for us to consider them carefully, that we may find out whether they exist in us, and if so, may try to overcome them. If, however, by God's grace, we find that we are free from them, our labour will not be lost, for we shall learn how to watch in our lives against the symptoms of their approach.

Let us begin with the sin of covetousness. In old age we ought to sit very loosely to all worldly possessions, realising that we must soon leave them behind, and that our great anxiety must be now to use them, while we are still able to do so, in God's service.

Sometimes, alas! the very opposite is the case, and with advancing years people cling more closely to their worldly possessions. Covetousness is always both a great sin in God's sight, and a great blemish in man's sight, but when it is found in the aged

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it is most dreadful. To see those who ought to be divesting themselves of all that binds them to this world, hoarding their money as though they could take it with them into God's presence, is one of the most piteous sights that can be found in this sinful world, and yet it is by no means rare.

Let us, however, examine what covetousness really is, and how it obtains such hold upon the soul. For covetousness is indeed the special temptation of the *soul*, as distinguished from the temptations of the *flesh* and of the *spirit*. When God created the soul of man He endowed it with ■ strange passion, ■ longing to have, to possess—something. Before the Fall that passion was satisfied with the possession of God Himself, man's Creator. Since the Fall it has led man to desire the possession either of God or of the creatures. By the term "creatures" in theology we mean all except God and the soul. Creatures are either material—like money, food, clothes, jewels, lands, and what not—or they may be immaterial things—states of life, such as health or sickness, success or failure, popularity or contempt, pleasure or pain, and so on.

This passion with which God endowed the soul, we call "love," and love leads the soul to desire to possess its object. Love of money is the desire to possess money; love of pleasure, to have pleasure; love of one of our fellow-creatures, to possess in

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return their affection—in a word, this passion can be directed towards anything in this world.

Now, God made the creatures to minister to man's happiness by supplying his needs, and leading him in loving thankfulness to God, Who created him. Indeed, we may look upon the creatures around us as so many steps in a ladder, by which we may mount up to the very heart of God, and learn His love for us. But Satan, alas! uses the creatures as instruments of temptation. He endeavours to teach us to love those creatures *for themselves*, and so constitutes them an obstacle and barrier to our love of God. Satan would have us fill our hearts with the love of creatures, fill our lives with the possession of creatures, so that there will be no room in our souls for the love of God, for the possession of God. The creatures are given us to minister to our needs. But too often they become the objects of our idolatry; for if we are living for them we are really worshipping them, making them our god. Creatures are given us to use, not to over-use, not to misuse, not to abuse. And we misuse them and abuse them when we allow them to come between us and God.

Again, creatures are given us as instruments of sacrifice, and very often their truest use in our life is their non-use or surrender. We see this very strikingly brought before us in the miracle of the healing of the Gadarene demoniacs.¹ Just outside

¹ Cf. S. Matt. viii. 28-34; S. Mark v. 1-21; S. Luke viii. 26-40.

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of Gadara, among the tombs, there dwelt two men, "exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way." They were a menace to the neighbourhood, a scourge to the community. They had often been bound with chains and fetters, but they had broken them, and so they were driven out among the tombs, and left there in their misery to cry and cut themselves with stones. They came to our Lord, and He healed them. But He suffered the devils by which they were possessed to pass into a herd of swine, and the swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and were choked in the sea. And when the people of Gadara heard this, and saw the devil-possessed men clothed and in their right mind, they began to pray Jesus to depart out of their coasts.

In some mysterious way the healing of these two devil-possessed men involved the loss to the Community of Gadara of a large number of swine, some two thousand, worth so much apiece. That is to say, it involved a sacrifice of creatures, a sacrifice which the Gadarenes were unwilling to make, for they preferred their swine to the healing of the demoniacs.

By its very strangeness this miracle forces upon us the lesson which we are so slow to learn, that there can be no progress in spiritual healing which does not involve some surrender or sacrifice of creatures—often of material creatures, of money, as in the case of the swine; some-

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times of pride, or position, or pleasure. But almost always in the progress of the soul we come in contact with the law of sacrifice, that is, with the law of the Cross. It has been observed that birds cannot rise from the ground in flight without spreading their wings in the form of the cross; and souls cannot rise from this earth without that sacrifice of which the Cross is the symbol.

By the destruction of the swine our Lord would teach us that creatures are given us, often, that they may be instruments of sacrifice, that we may surrender them for the good of our souls and for the service of God. The community of Gadara, when they saw that the healing of the devil-possessed men involved a loss to themselves, of property, besought our Lord to depart out of their coasts. It is true that these demoniacs were a scourge to the community, which had often tried to restrain them by its own chains and fetters, but which was powerless to cure them. Now they were cured, and the scourge removed; but, in the judgment of the Gadarenes, it cost too much—the sacrifice of their swine—so they besought our Lord to depart.

The action of the Gadarenes is ■ fair type of the world in all ages. It tries to restrain the outbreak of evil in its midst by its own fetters—conventional morality—and, when these are broken, by its prisons. There are, however, certain victims of sin which society is content to drive out of its

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midst into places well represented by the tombs of Gadara, where they are left to cry and cut themselves. In all our large cities there are regions given up to vice, where the poor victims of Satan are left in their misery. The world does ■ great deal by means of its prisons, and asylums, and police, to *protect itself* against these outcasts, but very little to *save them*; for it would involve a considerable sacrifice of creatures to carry the war into the enemy's quarters, to send ■ band of devoted missionaries to work in the slums, not merely to ameliorate the physical condition of those who dwell there, but to bring to them the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone can heal them.

Sacrifice, too, has a wonderful power of expanding all that is generous in the soul, and of increasing love; while covetousness, on the other hand, dries up the affections, and makes us not only selfish, but blind to our own true interests. So that the word which describes the man who is the slave of covetousness implies his wretchedness; for we call him a miser, and "miser" is a Latin adjective which means "the wretched one." No character is more contemptible in our eyes than that of the miser, and no man is probably more miserable in his own life. And yet miserliness is only covetousness carried to the extreme.

If covetousness is so unlovely in men generally, how much more so is this the case in the aged, in those who are soon to appear before the judgment

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throne and to give an account of their stewardship, of how they have used the goods committed to them in God's service—for the benefit of their fellow-men, and for the spread of Christ's kingdom!

We should examine ourselves very carefully about the sin of covetousness, for of all our sins it is the one we are most likely to deceive ourselves about. It has been said by priests of great experience that while they hear men and women confess every other sin under the Ten Commandments again and again, they rarely find anyone who accuses himself or herself of covetousness; and yet it is probably the most universal of all sins.

Under this head a few words may not be amiss in regard to making our will. Before we give up the goods with which God has intrusted us for awhile, we should provide carefully and prayerfully for their distribution where they will do the most good in God's service. We must think, of course, first of our own kin, but we must not forget the poor and the various works of the Church. In the Service for the Visitation of the Sick there is a rubric to the effect, that "The Minister should not omit earnestly to move such sick persons as are of ability, to be liberal to the poor." And this follows a rubric in which the minister is instructed to admonish the sick person to make his will. Our Lord on the Cross first forgave His enemies, then provided for the penitent thief, and lastly for His mother and S. John. After this, having settled

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His affairs in regard to this world, He turned to His Father and spoke of the concerns of His own soul.

Money is a trust, to be used for God's glory, both in our life, and in its distribution after our death by our will.

The saddest history in the world is that of Judas, one who loved Christ and followed Christ faithfully for awhile, but allowed his besetting sin of covetousness to regain possession of his soul. And this sin led him to sell his Master, to betray his Master, and finally to die in a state of impenitence.

CHAPTER XV.

Fretfulness.

 MONG the faults of old age, fretfulness is one of the most common. There is much in old age to make us fretful and to irritate us, for both pain and infirmity of body tend to fret us. To bear constant pain without fretting requires a great deal of grace. There is, of course, no doubt that God will always give us the grace we need for this if we ask Him. But there is the danger sometimes, indeed frequently, that when we ask, and He sends us the grace, we do not use it.

And this often arises from a strange mistake which people make about grace. They seem to think that grace works of itself, and without the co-operation of their will. Whereas we know that the function of grace is to strengthen our wills, and to enable them to effect what they could not do without grace. In response to our prayer God may have given us all the grace we need to bear our trials patiently and cheerfully. And yet, because our will makes no effort, we fail to use that grace,

Fretfulness.

and so, as S. Paul says, receive the grace of God in vain, that is, uselessly.¹

We read that our Lord healed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue.² And from the wider meaning of the Greek word translated "hand," it is probable that the disease extended through the whole arm, causing a kind of atrophy, or gradual drying up of the limb—a condition beyond the reach of any mere human skill. First, Christ commanded the man to stand forth in the midst; and then He said to him, "Stretch forth thine hand." The man might have replied that he had no strength in his arm, and could not stretch it forth until our Lord had healed it. He evidently did not do so, but made the effort to obey the command, and found not only strength to obey, but that his hand was restored whole as the other.

This we may take as an illustration of the way that grace works in us. We pray for grace, and then ourselves strive to do that for which we ask grace to accomplish; and in the effort which we make we find grace working and enabling us to accomplish our purpose.

It is often very much harder to endure trifling vexations which constantly worry us and so cause fretfulness, than it is to bear the really great troubles of our life. The bites of the mosquitoes, which in some countries swarm around us in summer-time, cause more discomfort, and are often harder to bear

¹ Cf. ■ Cor. vi. 1.

² Cf. S. Mark iii. 1-6.

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with patience, than some real pain. Each bite is in itself so trifling, but the constant succession of bites becomes most irritating, and the more so, that we are practically unable to do anything to protect ourselves from them. So it is with the little vexations of daily life which cause fretfulness. Taken individually, they are so trifling, but they recur so frequently that they wear upon our nerves, irritating us, and making us fretful. We do not actually lose our temper about them, but we lose our calmness and peace; they make us peevish and complaining. And we are tempted to say, they are more than we can bear with patience.

Now there is a point of view from which we may consider these trials, which is often overlooked. It is not merely to regard them as sins—for in themselves they are probably not sins, but at most imperfections—but to look upon them as spoiling much that is attractive in us, and therefore, hindering our power to influence others for good. A person may be possessed of a really noble and lovable character, and yet, if they are fretful, those who live with them, or constantly meet them, are more apt to notice the fretfulness than the real sterling worth which it not only hides, but often seems to spoil.

Then, too, we should regard temptations to irritability and fretfulness as opportunities given us of specially glorifying God by overcoming them. Each separate annoyance is not much in itself to bear; but if it be borne for love of God, for Christ's

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sake, it becomes pleasing and meritorious in God's eyes, and is a treasure laid up for us in heaven. It is not often that we have an opportunity of doing something heroic for God, but how many opportunities He vouchsafes us of bearing cheerfully with trifling annoyances, and thus both cultivating our self-control and showing our real love of Him. It has often been found helpful, in meeting this sort of vexations, not to make a general resolution that we will not give way to them, but to take some one thing which happens constantly and annoys us much, and to determine that for a short space of time, perhaps for a morning or an afternoon, we will watch ourselves, and not give way to it, in word, or action, or even thought. At the end of this period, if on examination we find we have kept our resolution, we should make an act of thanksgiving to God for having helped us to do so, and then renew the resolution for another short period. This gives definiteness to our struggle against fretfulness, and gradually develops in us the spirit of watchful self-control.

How beautiful it is to see one who, with much to try them, is always calm and patient, whose very presence seems to radiate peace on all around them! We have probably known such persons, and have counted it a privilege to be with them. Perhaps we can say that we have rarely visited them without coming away better for what we have seen and heard. On the other hand, we can doubt-

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less call to mind really good persons who have always so many ailments to complain of, so many vexations to talk about, that their conversation is irksome to us, and we would fain avoid being much in their company. Their fretfulness and discontent entirely destroy the influence for good which they might have with us. We recognise, perhaps, their goodness; but it is spoiled, so far as we are concerned, by the disagreeable habit of fretfulness.

There is yet one other remedy for fretfulness which cannot but be helpful. It is to dwell upon the many causes for thankfulness which we find in our daily lives, to think over and count up God's goodness to us in surrounding us with dear friends, if we have them; with those who love us and minister to us; to recall the many opportunities we have of serving God, which others are deprived of; and to make a special act of thanksgiving for each—in a word, the remedy for the spirit of fretfulness is the cultivation of the spirit of thankfulness; as S. Paul teaches us, "Speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹

¹ Ephes. v. 19, 20.

CHAPTER XVI.

Inconsiderateness.



NOTHER of the lesser faults of old age is want of consideration for those who minister to us, our servants and attendants, and even sometimes our relations. We have to depend on others for the supply of many of our wants; and when we are sick, perhaps we are even obliged to give a good deal of trouble; and some do this in an exacting, inconsiderate way, which is very unlovely, to say the least. How delightful it is to minister to those who are gracious and even grateful! It makes the hardest tasks a pleasure, the most disagreeable duties a privilege. And it really is not difficult to cultivate this spirit of consideration for others; for it is only the spirit of unselfishness—the looking upon things not only from our own point of view, but from the standpoint of others.

This is one of the many lessons which our Lord teaches us with wonderful pathos from the death-bed of His Cross. He uttered therefrom seven sayings, the first three of which were entirely

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taken up with interests of others. He was suffering excruciating agony, but there was not one word of complaint about His own pains. He thinks of those around Him and strives to help them. First, He prays for His murderers—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹ You see, He not only prays for them, but He makes excuse for them—an excuse which was true; they did not know what they were doing; they did not know how heinous a sin they were committing; probably they did not know that they were crucifying the Lord of life. They might have known, but they were blinded by sin. And so we should try to find excuse for those who vex us, and perhaps even wrong us. They do not realise what they are doing, they do not know how much we feel their conduct. And even if they do it intentionally, we must still pray that they may be forgiven.

In the second Word from the Cross our Lord thinks of those who are suffering like Himself, of the malefactors who were crucified with Him, soothing the dying moments of the penitent robber with the promise not only of remembrance, but of a share in His kingdom. So our sufferings should lead us to think of others who suffer; and when we are able to do so, to strive to minister to their needs; to send them, for instance, little comforts, which will be both ■ mark of our

¹ S. Luke xxiii, 34.

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sympathy and thoughtfulness, and a means, perhaps, of alleviating some of their wants.

In the third Word from the Cross our Lord shows His solicitude for the *sorrows* of others, providing for His bereaved mother and heart-broken friend. We should try to enter into the sorrows of others. Sometimes ■ few words of sympathy with one in sorrow (either written or uttered) are as grateful and refreshing as a stream of flowing water to a thirsty man.

There are two things we have to bear in mind in regard to inconsiderateness—that we must carefully avoid the fault by watching against any tendency to be exacting either in word or manner, and that we must not be content merely with this negative avoidance of the sin, but must go on to cultivate a graciousness of manner which really springs from an unselfish interest in those around us. Instead of dwelling only upon our own ailments or difficulties, how much more beautiful it is to sympathize with the ailments and difficulties of others, to try to help and teach them both by word and example to bear them patiently and to use them as a means of glorifying God and forwarding their own sanctification.

A really unselfish person is possessed of a very great power of attractiveness—one who is not always talking about herself, or her own interests, or her own sufferings, but who can enter into and sympathize with the struggles of others, who

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obtains many an opportunity of speaking words of encouragement and counsel just because she is so ready to hear and sympathize in the difficulties and sorrows of all with whom she comes in contact. There are some to whom we should never think of opening our hearts, because they are unsympathetic or selfish; but there are others to whom we are spontaneously drawn, just because we feel that they are unselfish, and therefore that they can enter into our griefs and toils.

In advancing years, when we are shut off from much active work for God, we ought to be the more eager to use the opportunities for influencing others for good, realising that such opportunities are among the most precious privileges of old age.

There is one special danger which, if not carefully avoided, is liable to destroy, or at least greatly injure, our opportunities of work for God—and that is, want of sympathy with the interests of the young, and with the opinions, and perhaps manners, of their day. It is natural for those who are growing old to live in the past. Their ideals, to a great extent, are the ideals which they had when they were young; and there is a great tendency to regard the habits and modes of thought of to-day as a grievous deterioration from the ideals of our own youth.

Probably there is often a good deal of justice in this. In many respects the world was better

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perhaps, when we were young, than it is now. And yet, certainly, it is not so in every respect. And even where things have changed for the worse, we have to take them as they are, and make the best of them, if we are to have any influence with the young, whose ideals are in the present and not in the past. To help us to meet this difficulty, we must remember that when we were young, old people mourned over the degeneracy of the world, which to us then seemed so bright, just as, perhaps, we are inclined to do now. However this may be, having before us the desire still to be ■ force for good in the world, we must adapt ourselves, to some extent, to the world as it is, and not merely lament that it is not what it was in our younger days and refuse to see that there are still possibilities for doing good and serving God, even under the altered condition of things which we regret.

In a word, the danger we must strive to avoid is the pessimism of old age, the taking ■ dark view of present modes of life, the refusing to be in touch with the aspirations of the younger generation, and so losing our hold upon them. We must strive always for optimism ; and, while not shutting our eyes to much that is evil around us, we must be generous to recognise all that is good, even though there be new ways of doing things, which do not seem to us quite as admirable as the way in which we used to do the same things

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of old. Keep in touch with the hopes and interests of the young, and you will still be able, to some extent at least, to guide the young, and to be ■ force for good to the end of life,

Z S. March 31. 08

CHAPTER XVII.

The Virtues of Old Age.

Patience.

T is a grateful task to turn from the faults of old age to its virtues; and foremost, if not first among them, we must certainly place the great virtue of patience. It is a virtue which we should look for especially in advancing years, partly because it is acquired gradually, and only after long and persevering effort; so that, if we have not attained to it when we are growing old, there is little hope of our winning it in this life, partly because in old age it ought to be easier to be patient, for the reason that the impetuosity of youth should then have given place to the self-control of a more mature character.

Patience, of course, must be cultivated at every stage of life. It must not be thought to be a virtue so exclusively belonging to maturer years, that the young may be excused for being impatient. But, while we must always be striving

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to acquire this virtue, we must especially endeavour to manifest it in our declining years, realising that ■■ impatient old age is altogether unlovely in the sight of men, and certainly displeasing in the sight of God.

In ordinary Christian life the virtue of patience comes second only to that of charity, and it is closely allied to that perfection which is the great end for which every Christian must be striving. This S. James teaches us when he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."¹ It is very clear that in this passage S. James associates the virtue of patience with perfection in such a way as to suggest a very close relationship between the two. And indeed it is not too much to infer from his words that perfection is scarcely possible without the virtue of patience.

The only other virtue which is thus linked with perfection is the supreme virtue of charity, which S. Paul describes as the "bond of perfectness."² There are, of course, other means which must be used if we would attain to perfection—such as prayer, self-denial, and spiritual exercises. But these are rather agencies for spiritual progress than virtues associated with it.

¹ S. James i. 2-4.

² Col. iii. 14.

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We shall, of course, call to mind our Lord's words in regard to patience—"In your patience possess ye your souls;"¹ or, as it should be translated, "In your patience ye shall win (or acquire possession of) your souls." These words suggest to us a very solemn thought, that it is possible not to win our souls; that is, to lose them. We know many ways in which the soul may be lost—by worldliness; by sin of various kinds; by leaving undone the work of life, through neglecting to use our talents and opportunities. We are told here of one way in which it may be won—through patience. If we reflect on these words of our Master, spoken during the closing days of His life on earth, they will help us to realise the great importance of practising the virtue of patience. The word itself—or, rather, the Greek word of which it is a translation²—means endurance, with a suggestion in it of perseverance. But we need not confine patience to this one meaning, but may rather consider it now as including self-control, a real desire to conform ourselves to God's Will, and a cheerful acceptance of the trials of our daily life.

It is evident that patience may be exercised in three ways—towards other people, towards ourselves, and towards God. Let us consider each of these.

¹ S. Luke xxi. 19.

² *ὑπομονή*.

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I. We may begin by observing that, partly from sin in ourselves, and partly from sin in others, all people are liable to be at times a trial to our patience.

If the trial comes from those above us, our natural inclination is to revolt; but this is held in check often by human respect, or by the fear of consequences to ourselves, or from our self-interest. These motives, however, are purely natural, and not in any sense spiritual motives. They may prevent us from manifesting the spirit of revolt; but this is not the exercise of the virtue of patience, since it is often accompanied by an interior sullenness and an exterior habit of complaining to others of the trials which we have to put up with. This sullenness and complaint quite spoils the virtue of patience; for it shows that we endure only because we are obliged to endure, and not because we welcome an opportunity to glorify God by the exercise of patience.

If, however, our trials come from those who are below us in station—from our servants or dependants, or even our children—how often we hurt their feelings by unmerited rebuke, or cutting words, or a frigid manner; all of which are manifestations of impatience. But, lastly, if our trials come from our equals, there is the temptation to show our irritation, at least, by an impatient demeanour, or ungentele words.

If we try to trace impatience to its source,

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while it sometimes arises from a quick, nervous temperament, yet we shall find more often that its root is pride. We are impatient because we cannot have our own way, or do not receive the consideration we think is due to us. Pride, indeed, is the root of many sins, and among its most common fruits we must certainly count impatience. The remedy is the cultivation of a habit of recollection, a dwelling in the presence of God; for nothing can be a greater check to impatience than the thought that God's eye is upon us, God's grace ready to help us to conquer our impatience.

II. We greatly need to have patience with ourselves. This is sometimes more difficult than to have patience with others. And, indeed, the necessity of patience with ourselves has been so overlooked, that some people have come to think that impatience with self is a virtue. Self-vexation, however, must be carefully distinguished from contrition. The one arises from pride, or love of self; the other, from penitence, or love of God.

But in what ways do we generally manifest impatience with self?—By fretting under temptations and trials, because we forget their purpose, and that God's providence permits them; then, in actual sin, when we are more vexed at the injury to our self-esteem than we are at the thought of having offended God. But the chief way in

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which we need to exercise the virtue of patience with ourselves is in refusing to give way to depression at the slowness of our spiritual progress; in not allowing ourselves to be disturbed at the want of sensible joy in our devotions; in not giving way to discouragement because we cannot conquer our sins all at once. Impatience under these trials comes either from a lack of humility, or from ignorance of the great difficulties involved in the service of God, in forgetfulness of the great power and ingenuity of the Tempter.

Yet another cause is lack of faith and trust in God. We want to see our own progress, we want to know *why* temptation happens to us, instead of being content to leave these things to God, and simply to trust Him, and cheerfully to do our best to be patient under trial.

III. Lastly, we need to have patience with God. Here, while we must speak with great reverence, it will help us to recognise the fact that God condescends to try our patience in various ways, both in His ordinary providence by which He shapes and guides our natural life, and also in ways which belong peculiarly to the spiritual life. Let us notice, under this head, four ways in which God tries us:

I. By the slowness with which He works. This is one of the great characteristics of God, and it flows from His eternity. We are always in such a hurry; we want to see the results of

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our work at once. God can afford to wait; for a thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday.¹ God sets in motion certain forces, and waits for them to work out their full results. We see this in Creation. How slow and majestic was the march of geologic time! How many myriads of years passed before the world in which we live reached its present state of development! And how wonderful it is now, with all its countless kingdoms, animal, vegetable and mineral, bearing witness to the wisdom, power, and love of God! So, too, in the history of Redemption; man fell, and God redeemed him. But how many centuries of struggle passed before that Redemption was accomplished, centuries in which man was gradually being taught his own weakness and inability to conquer sin, and at the same time learning to trust in God and to hope for a Saviour!

And we are taught the same lesson in our own lives—that God's method of working is slow, very slow, but sure. We want to become saints all at once, to conquer all our faults by one great effort, and to cultivate all the Christian virtues in a few months or a year. And we forget, or, rather, fail to realise, that this is as impossible as to conceive of the development of the world in which we live in a week—more impossible; for while we can conceive of physical changes occurring rapidly, we ought to know that the law of moral

¹ Cf. Psalm xc. 4.

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change and moral growth demands long periods of time. Faults cannot be eradicated by one effort because the conquest of our faults implies a moral change in our character, which takes time. And, in the same way, we cannot become saints in a year, since holiness means moral growth, and moral growth requires not only constant effort but generally many years.

2. Then, again, God tries us by His hiddenness. We long to see Him working, but He hides Himself. A child plants a seed in the ground, and digs it up again to see how it is growing, and so stops all growth. And we, too, often act very much like children in our spiritual life. We are so anxious to see our own virtues developing, that we kill the growing virtue, and in its place foster the weed of pride. God's hiddenness is an opportunity given us for the development of faith and patience.

3. Sometimes we are tempted to think God changeable. It is true that we know, as a matter of theology, that God cannot change. And yet He seems sometimes to be so near to us, and sometimes so far off; sometimes to take such an interest in all our efforts, encouraging us in our prayers; and at others He seems to have forgotten us, and our prayers, therefore, seem to have been lifeless and useless.

But it is very much the same in Nature. The year has its seasons. In the winter-time there are

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whole days when we do not see the sun. It is hidden by the banks of leaden clouds, which make all things seem cheerless and unattractive; but we know that on these cloudy days the sun is just as near to us as on the bright days; and our experience of the past teaches us that they will not last for ever, that the storm will pass away, and the sun will shine again.

So is it in our spiritual life. It has its seasons—its spring, and summer, and autumn, and winter—its spring, in the first fervour of the soul, when all spiritual things are so interesting and attractive, when it is so easy to pray and to fast; when the services of God's Church seem so helpful, and temptation and trial do not trouble us much. Then comes the scorching summer of temptation, when God is testing the reality of our spiritual life. After this the autumn follows, the time when the leaves of the trees are parched and lose their verdure, but when the fruit ripens. So the autumns of the spiritual life are those seasons in which we feel less enthusiasm than in the springtime, but produce more fruit. And lastly, there comes the winter, when all seems dead and dreary again.

But we must be patient and wait, knowing that winter always gives place to spring; that it is not God Who changes, but the circumstances of our life; that God is always the same loving Father; but that He sends us, through His providence,

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what we need, at one time, to stimulate us to effort; at another, to test our endurance; at another, to prove our faith and trust in Him.

4. And lastly, God tries us by His chastisements. He sends sorrows and troubles into our life; and we must bear them in the spirit of patience, recognising in them not marks of God's anger, but rather of His love, and welcoming them as opportunities for manifesting our conformity to the Divine Will. We have been saying many times a day all through our life, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." The time of trouble and chastisement is the opportunity for proving that we have meant what we said, that we spoke the truth when we prayed, 'Thy will be done.'

It is so easy to say this when our life is free from care; but it is so glorious to prove it when God's chastisements are upon us, by bearing them with loving patience, by recognising in them the splendid opportunity for proving our conformity to God's Will.

We must, then, exercise patience towards God; and, that we may do so, must cultivate the first gift of the Holy Ghost—the Spirit of holy fear, the Spirit of true reverence—which will save us from the sin of criticising God's providence.

Patience is a virtue which we have been trying to cultivate, I hope, all through our lives; but now, as our years are drawing to a close, we must

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make ■ still greater effort to attain that perfect virtue of patience, that "we may be perfect and entire, wanting in nothing," only waiting for God to call us home

CHAPTER XVIII

Cheerfulness.

HE first virtue of old age is undoubtedly patience. It is not so easy, however, to decide which comes second. But I shall venture to assign the second place to one which is a sort of satellite of patience, closely allied to it, and illuminating with its attractive brightness that more sombre virtue.

Cheerfulness is a virtue which has a two-fold effect—on the one hand, it is a great element of strength in our own spiritual life, and on the other its attractive influence on those around us can hardly be over-estimated. In our own life cheerfulness is one of the most effective weapons which we can use against temptation, for there are many temptations whose force is hardly felt by the cheerful man, but whose power is immensely increased by depression or discouragement. This is, perhaps, most often realised after a fall into sin. Some are so discouraged and depressed by their failure, that for a considerable time they make but little effort to regain the lost ground, and during this period are

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at the mercy of many other temptations. Others, however, after a fall, pick themselves up at once, and with humble cheerfulness try to do better.

Depression and discouragement, while sometimes ■ matter of temperament, are very often the result of ■ subtle form of pride. Our pride is hurt by the revelation to ourselves of our own weakness ; and instead of grieving over our sin as displeasing to God, we are angry with ourselves because of the weakness which the fall brings home to us. This state of mind invites the attacks of the Tempter, and we often receive many other wounds from his darts before we really set ourselves straight again. The cheerful man, on the other hand, is humble ; for humility is one of the roots of cheerfulness. He is not surprised at his own failures ; for humility has taught him to realise how weak he is apart from God's grace, and when he has fallen, he simply makes his act of contrition, and at once strives to regain the lost ground.

If we may take a very homely illustration, the two characters are well represented by two children running a race in play, and both of them stumbling and falling. Both are only slightly hurt. The cheerful child picks himself up at once, and runs on his way, brushing the dust from his clothes. The other one lies where he has fallen, crying and moaning, until some one comes to pick him up and set him on his feet again. Meanwhile, he has lost the race, and given a good deal of trouble to

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others. So it is with people who give way to depression. They lose a great deal of ground in their spiritual course, and they are very disagreeable and troublesome to all around them. Cheerful people, on the other hand, quickly make up whatever they may have lost by their mistakes and failures, and are attractive and helpful to all who know them.

This brings us to the second effect of cheerfulness —its attractive power with those whom God would have us influence. Our own courage inspires with courage those weaker than ourselves; our own cheerfulness in bearing trials and disasters sets an example which others instinctively follow. So that a cheerful man or woman is a real influence for good in their own little world.

Patience is a great virtue, and one which, as we have seen, ought to belong especially to the aged. But patience gains much in its power for good from being brightened by cheerfulness. Most of us have many stormy days in our life in this world, and cheerfulness is like the sunshine which breaks through the rifts in the clouds, and often gives to the darkest a silver lining.

There is a question one meets at this point which it would be well to answer. Some may say, Is not cheerfulness a mere matter of temperament? Can it be acquired? Cheerfulness, of course, is sometimes a matter of temperament, and when this is the case it loses much of its merit, because it

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is then only a natural virtue. The supernatural virtue of cheerfulness, however, can be acquired, since it depends not upon our temperament, but upon two great Christian virtues—humility, and trust in God.

Humility, as we have already indicated, robs temptation of much of its power, and takes even from failure the bitterness of its sting. If we are humble, we are not surprised at our weakness. Indeed, we knew that we were weak; and therefore, we trace our fall, not so much to weakness as to our own fault in neglecting either to use God's grace, or to exercise watchfulness against temptation. We say of our fall, "It was my own fault; I must be more watchful and more diligent in using the means of grace."

The other source of the supernatural virtue of cheerfulness is, trust in God. But this implies a recognition that God's providence orders all things in our life, so that our very difficulties and trials, whether they come from the world, or the flesh, or the devil, are known to God, and permitted by Him, as a means to an end, and that end is our sanctification. S. Paul reminds us of this when he writes, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."¹ What an encouraging thought, that the Will of God, the Power which called all things into being, and preserves all things in being, is concerned about our sanctification, and orders the circum-

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 3.

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stances of our life to that great end! Surely, we can bear our trials, not only with patience, but with cheerfulness, when we realise that they are sent, not to hinder us, but to help us to become holy.

Then again, a perfect trust in God will enable us to see in our trials opportunities not only for sanctification, but for glorifying God. Now, one of the great purposes of our life is to glorify God; for by this we are fulfilling the end of our creation.

There is, however, another and a deeper reason why we should cultivate the spirit of cheerfulness. It is that Christianity ought to be a religion of joy, and not of gloom. It is true that Christianity has as its symbol the Cross, which tells of sorrow and suffering; but it also reminds us that sorrow and suffering are by the Cross changed into brightness and joy. On the last night of His life, when our Lord was bidding His disciples farewell, He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy . . . Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."¹

"I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." The sorrow was to last but for a few brief days, but the joy

¹ S. John xvi. 20-22.

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was to be without end. The promise was fulfilled on Easter Day, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, and their hearts rejoiced. And though their lives in this world were full of hardship, and toil, and pain, and sorrow, yet that joy never left them, that joy no man could take from them.

And if we turn from the Master's words to the life of one of His greatest disciples—S. Paul—what do we see there? More difficulty, and hardship, and pain, and disappointment, than in most lives ; and yet, running through it all, the golden thread of joy, of supernatural joy ; for S. Paul does not seem to have been by temperament a particularly cheerful character. He learned to rejoice by the realisation of the immense happiness conferred upon him through the love of Christ ; and so he calls on his disciples to rejoice with him—“Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.”¹

This joy depends largely upon dwelling not only upon the bright side of life, but upon the privileges of Christianity—to have been made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of heaven ; to have become partakers of the divine nature ; to be loved by God as His children ; to possess the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, as the Guide and Strength of our life ; to feed upon the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Food of our soul ; to have the assurance that whatsoever we ask in His name, in prayer, it shall be given to

¹ Phil. iv. 4.

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us. Surely, these privileges more than counterbalance the trials and sorrows of our life in this world!

We must remember, also, that joy is not only a supernatural virtue, but that it is one of the fruits of the Holy Ghost, the second in order; for S. Paul tells us that "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."¹ If, then, the spirit of joy is not in our life, must we not trace its absence to some hindrance to the work of the Holy Ghost in our soul? A tree is known by its fruits, and joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Now, joy has a peculiar function in the Christian life—the function of overcoming the friction which does so much, not only to make our lives unlovely, but to wear out our spiritual strength. In the Old Testament, joy is associated with oil as its symbol, in that wonderful prophecy of the office of Christ, the fulfilment of which our Lord Himself proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth. Isaiah says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me . . . to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning;"² and again, in the forty-fifth Psalm, it is prophesied of the Messiah, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is ■ right

¹ Gal. v. 22, 23.

² Isaiah lxi. 1-3; cf. also S. Luke iv. 18.

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sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness : therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."¹

Oil has many uses, but one of the most universal is to lubricate, and so to overcome friction. When machinery becomes rusty we know how difficult it is to put it in motion ; and, if great force be applied, the machine is likely either to wear itself out, through excessive friction, or else to break itself to pieces. But pour a little oil into the rusty wheel, and turn it gently, and in a few minutes the rust is worn off, and the machine is working smoothly. So it is in life. How much friction there is, even amongst good people, even with those who desire really to give themselves to God ! They rub against one another, and the result is disastrous—loss of temper, loss of charity, loss of peace.

And what is the remedy ? The oil of gladness, the spirit of joy—in a word, cheerfulness. If it be true that a soft answer turneth away wrath, it is equally true that a cheerful spirit often makes friction impossible. There are some people with whom you cannot quarrel ; their very presence seems to bring peace and harmony to everyone, and the secret of it generally is that they possess the supernatural virtue of joy. They are light-hearted, not because they are optimists, or of a sanguine temperament, but because they are

¹ Psalm xlv. 6, 7.

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Christians, and because joy is the special possession of the Christian, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Surely, when life is approaching its end, and we are standing on the threshold of Christ's kingdom in heaven, the spirit of cheerfulness should dominate our life. If you read the lives of the saints you will find that they were always cheerful—always cheerful, because always happy. Where can you find among them one who was gloomy or morose? How could they be when, in spite of many sorrows and sufferings, they were continually rejoicing? They were always happy in the knowledge that God loved them, and that they loved God. We often speak of the attractiveness of sanctity. May not this attractiveness be traced to the happiness, and therefore cheerfulness, of the saints?

What a power cheerfulness is in our lives! a power delivering us from many temptations, and enabling us to overcome others; a power by which we may influence those around us, helping them to see the beauty and happiness of a life given up to God's service.

CHAPTER XIX.

Kindness.

KEXT to the virtues of patience and cheerfulness I should be inclined to place that of kindness. We all know what we mean by kindness, although probably we have never attempted to analyze it. If, however, we do this, I think we shall find that kindness is a combination of the two fruits of the Spirit which we call "Gentleness" and "Goodness."¹ These two fruits are closely related, "Goodness" being the complement of "Gentleness," the active manifestation of that more passive virtue. Indeed "Goodness" has been considered to be related to "Gentleness" much in the same way as "Beneficence" is to "Benevolence." "Gentleness," or "Benignity," as it is sometimes translated, is that benevolent disposition from which proceed beneficent actions; and kindness is, as I have said, a combination of both; for there must first be the kind disposition, rooted in a charity which

¹ Gal. v. 22.

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"doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." And then that kindly disposition will manifest itself through the kind thoughts, and words, and deeds, which are like sunbeams brightening this dark world in which we live.

From another point of view we may define kindness as the overflow of self upon others. God's kindness was manifested in Creation, which was the overflow of His benignity, producing a world of creatures for whom He willed happiness. Kindness in us is, essentially, being unselfish, doing to others what we would wish them to do to us. The importance of the virtue of kindness is very generally overlooked or under-rated. It may, perhaps, be best estimated by its effects.

The world in which we live is an unhappy world, because of the lack of kindness in the individuals who form its constituents. So that it is within the power of one who exercises the virtue of kindness greatly to mitigate the unhappiness of the world, so far at least as his own circle of influence extends. A kind person makes those around him happy.

Kindness, however, is not only a great factor in the happiness of the world, but probably the greatest missionary agency in winning the world to Christ. In missionary work, especially among the ignorant and sinful, how often the first

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 5.

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awakening of the soul to better things may be traced to a kind word or action! It is the forerunner of grace; for it predisposes the sinner to listen, with respect, if not with gratitude, to the teachings of one who by kindness has already shown a real interest in his soul. Kindness has done more than zeal, or eloquence, or learning, in winning souls to Christ, in preparing the way for grace to do its work of leading the soul, through penitence, both to freedom and to knowledge of its own capacity. For when, through penitence, a soul is cleansed from sin, it sees visions of happiness in the future, of possibilities of usefulness, and of the hope of glory.

Kindness is also a great moral agent in the restoration of man; for it has an extraordinary power of bringing out the good which exists in the character of others. It shows a man that he is worth something, and appeals to his self-respect. It awakens the germ of goodness which is to be found in everyone, although, perhaps, it has lain long dormant. And when goodness once begins to grow, if it be aided by grace, the sinner may become transformed into the saint.

Another characteristic of kindness is, that it is contagious. One act of kindness leads to another. It is like the sowing of seed, from which an abundant harvest springs. You do a

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kind act, and it suggests another kind act to someone else. For the world is unkind far more from thoughtlessness than from malice.

Then again, kindness is one of the great helps which God has given us in this world to aid us in bearing our sorrows and sufferings; for by it we may indeed bear one another's burdens without greatly increasing our own. I remember, many years ago, a young girl, long since called to her rest, whose life was one of great physical suffering. She was seldom entirely free from pain, and at times the pain was very severe. I was trying to express to her my sympathy, and my recognition of the courage and cheerfulness with which she seemed always to bear her pain, when she said to me, "Everyone is so kind, that it is quite a compensation for my suffering. If I had no pain to bear, people would not be so kind as they all are. It is worth having pain, to have also the many acts of kindness and sympathy which it brings forth."

Lastly, kindness is a great encouragement to the weak to persevere; for a kind word often starts a soul again that has nearly given up in despair. And we must remember that in all these various effects of kindness we are often quite unconscious of the good we have done by a kind act or word. Kindness must be exercised in thought, and word, and deed. Let us briefly consider each of them.

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What a little world our thoughts are! A little world, but very populous, and peopled with most active citizens. A man's character, both moral and spiritual, depends very largely on how this little world is governed — on the authority which these citizens recognise, on the spirit which pervades them. And for our present purpose we may say that the spirit should be that of kindness.

Kind thoughts! How truly they reveal a Christian character! And yet, how rare they are! When we think of others, it is so often to criticize them, to think of their mistakes and faults, to pass judgment upon their actions. And yet our Lord has said, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."¹ These words in S. Luke seem to correspond to the more general precept in S. Matthew—"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect."² They form part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. And where S. Matthew tells us to be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect, S. Luke particularises the virtue in which we are to strive to be godlike, namely, mercy—"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." And then our attention is directed to two special channels of mercy:

¹ S. Luke vi. 36, 37.

² S. Matt. v. 48.

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The judgment of others and almsgiving—"Give, and it shall be given unto you."

The first channel of mercy, the judgment of others, has a great deal to do with our subject—kindness in thought. We are apt to lose the force of this passage, from the inadequacy of the English translation. Three stages in the judgment of others are here indicated—"Judge not," "Condemn not," "Forgive."

First, "Judge not." The word used indicates inward and logical judgment. We are to abstain from judging others even in thought. How little good criticism can do to anyone, and how much harm it often does to our own soul! Then too, as a rule, we have not the material for a just judgment. We do not know enough about the motives of other people. We do not even know, at all fully, the conditions under which they are acting. So that our judgment must be often very unjust. Therefore our Lord says to us, Be merciful; do not judge; do not criticize.

There are, however, occasions which are exceptions to this rule, when we must pass judgment upon the actions of others. Even at such times our Lord reminds us to be merciful; for He says, "Condemn not." The Greek word here indicates the formal and official judgment in word, the passing sentence upon another's acts. Be merciful; and, if possible, do not condemn; for you yourself will have to stand before a judgment seat; and

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the only condition upon which you can hope then to obtain mercy will be that you have yourself shown mercy.

But there is still another contingency for which our Lord would prepare us. When we cannot honestly acquit; when we must, for the sake of justice, condemn, then Christ says, still, Be merciful; condemn, if you must, but forgive. So our Lord judged His murderers when He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹ So our Lord judged the penitent robber when He said, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise."²

Our thoughts are better exponents of our true character than our words; for our words are often restrained by human respect, by fear, or desire to please; while the only restraint upon our thoughts is the recollection of God's presence, and our own self-discipline. It is not easy, therefore, to rule our world of thought, so that the spirit of kindness shall always prevail. We must be constantly on the watch, at least for some time, to stop unkind thoughts, to root up the weeds of bitterness, to cultivate the beautiful flower of kindness.

A result of kindness in thought will be kindness in word. We have already touched upon the power of kind words to influence others for good, to encourage them to persevere in efforts to serve

¹ S. Luke xxiii. 34.

² S. Luke xxiii. 43.

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God. If we look back through our own lives we shall doubtless be able to trace the effect of kind words upon ourselves, to note the many times when a kind word stimulated us to renewed effort, or comforted us in despondency.

It will be well for us to remember at this point that kindness may be exercised not only in speaking, but in listening. A kind and sympathetic listener, one who is sympathetic because he is kind, has an immense power of drawing a soul to seek counsel. And this leads to many opportunities for doing God's work, by influencing others aright, as well as by brightening many a sorrow-stricken life.

And lastly, we must not stop at words—we must go on to kind actions. They need not always be very great deeds; some little act, which shows consideration and thoughtfulness, frequently has great power in winning souls to better things; and these kind actions, as well as our gifts of money, come under the head of Almsgiving; and thus we fulfil the twofold injunction of our Lord to be merciful—in our judgment of others and by almsgiving.

In old age we are shut off from many opportunities of working for God, but not from the opportunity of exercising kindness. The very fact that we are deprived of occasions of serving God, which are open to those who are young, should make us prize more highly, and cultivate with

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greater diligence, the virtue of kindness, by which we bring sunshine into the little world which moves around us, and often win souls to greater love for God.

CHAPTER XX.

Heavenly-Mindedness.

EAVENLY-MINDEDNESS is not the last of the virtues of old age, but the last which we shall consider. It is the result of habitual communion with God, of the realisation of the nearness of the other world. The fact of this nearness requires to be dwelt on, not merely to be acknowledged. We should *think* of heaven, as those about to start upon a journey think of their journey's end, and the friends and loved ones there who will welcome them. We should feel, in regard to heaven, as those who have prepared for a journey, who have packed their boxes and all that they intend to take with them, and who are waiting for the hour to arrive when they are to start for the station. The work of preparation is over, and the time of waiting is, in a sense, a time of rest. They take some interest in what is going on around them, and yet they sit very loosely to the things which they are leaving, their thoughts and hearts are occupied with the friends

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and scenes which await them at their journey's end.

So should it be with the aged in regard to heaven. Their work in this world is almost done; their preparation for leaving it ought to be made. They have packed up what they can carry with them to heaven; that is, the virtues of Christian life, the treasures of Christian character. They are looking forward to those whom they will find awaiting them in their eternal home—their Father, "Our Father, Which art in heaven," to Whom they have been praying all their lives, from Whom every good gift and every perfect gift has come to them. They will be with their Father in one of the many mansions of His house, in the place which in His love He has especially allotted to them.

They are longing for the moment to come when they shall meet face to face their Lord, and Master, and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who was the Strength of their life here, the special Object of their love and devotion, Whom with the eye of faith they beheld beneath the sacramental veils in every communion they made, through Whose merits they offered each prayer which they addressed to their heavenly Father, and in Whose words, recorded in the Gospels, they found throughout their life encouragement and guidance. To see that thorn-crowned face, upon the representation of which in the crucifix they gazed so often, to see it no longer encircled with thorns, but wearing the crown of

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glory; and not only to see Christ, but to be with Him, to reign with Him in His throne, will be joy past all words to describe!

And then, that dear Spirit of God, the Holy Ghost the Comforter, Who was their Guide and Consolation throughout the long, weary years of this life, Whom they grieved so often by their waywardness—there will be the happiness of never grieving Him again!

There will, however, not only be God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in heaven, but the saints and angels—the saints, human beings like ourselves, who knew all life's bitterest trials, who passed through great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, and who now stand before the throne of God, clothed in white raiment, and with palms in their hands. They will see the saints manifesting every beauty of human character which has been sanctified by divine grace. And there will be no monotony among the saints; for they will find there every possible variety of character. They will differ as one star differs from another star in glory, but they will everyone of them be all-glorious.

Then, too, there will be the holy angels, those pure spirits who ministered to them during their life on earth. Now they will share their joy, and join with them in praising their heavenly King.

But yet again, there will be the meeting with those loved ones who have borne with them the

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toil and strife of earth, some of whom went to their reward before them. They will meet them in the heavenly home. And what a meeting that will be!—one of joyous congratulation, for heaven is won and possessed; and there will be no more parting, no more separation, no more change, in that heavenly state.

When we attain to heaven we shall know even as we are known. And what a knowledge that will be!—not the superficial knowledge which we acquire with much pain and difficulty in this world, and which at best is uncertain and full of error, but an absolute knowledge! We shall know even as we are known. But to know God absolutely will be to love Him perfectly; and to love Him perfectly will be to experience the greatest and most entrancing happiness of which the human soul is capable. Our greatest happiness here on earth is to love, even though our love be so imperfect and mingled with selfishness. But to love God perfectly, with every power of our nature, will be to experience in every faculty its highest possible happiness! This is what the aged may look forward to in heaven, look forward to as very near. And of this they may have a foretaste even now on earth, if they are exercising their privileges of seeing, and knowing, and loving God, through meditation on His Word, and feeding on the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar.

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And how wonderful will be the result of all this upon the mind ! It will form a habit of looking at things from a heavenly point of view. Without losing our interest in the good things of this world, without losing our sympathy for those whom we love here, we shall have formed a habit of seeing things as they are in God's sight. So we shall recognise the weakness, unreality, and worthlessness of many things here which the world prizes, and we shall realise the importance and value of those things which will live on with us in the world beyond, or whose results will be seen in our life there. Among these we may specially mention sorrow and suffering, a sorrow which will be turned into joy in that kingdom where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;"¹ a suffering which will entitle us to reign with Christ ; for we are promised that, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."²

And this heavenly-mindedness will show itself in our character. Our Lord, when instructing His disciples, said, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning ; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."³ The "girded loins" refers to the outward, active life ; the "burning lights" to the inner life ; but "yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord" sets forth the aspect of a true disciple's life which

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

² Tim. ii. 12.

³ S. Luke xii. 35, 36.

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the world takes note of. Those who are heavenly-minded are like men who are waiting for their Lord; their thoughts, their hearts, their hopes fixed on heaven. They are in this world, but not of this world, recognising and fulfilling its duties, and yet witnessing by their characters that they are waiting for a call to leave the world and to be with Christ.

The effect of this habit of mind upon others will be very great; for no influence can be greater than the influence of one who lives as though he believes that he is a citizen of heaven, that earth is not his home, but only a place of pilgrimage.

And then, too, there is the effect upon ourselves of this habit of heavenly-mindedness. It will result in a peace and calm which the storms of the world cannot disturb; a purity of heart which checks worldly longings, and shines more and more with the reflection of God's presence in the soul; a patience which nothing can ruffle, and which endures all things allowed by God's providence; and a cheerfulness which sheds sunlight upon our path.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Opportunities of Old Age.

OPPORTUNITY! What is it but another name for our life here, which is made up of opportunities? Opportunities meet us at every turn, presenting themselves to us every day; opportunities of so many kinds that it would be impossible to enumerate them; opportunities of evil and of good; of losing our soul, or of winning heaven!

But opportunity implies responsibility. And this is what S. Paul teaches in that wonderful passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where he says, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."¹ The word translated "time" might better be rendered "opportunity;" and "redeeming" means "buying up for yourselves, seizing upon and making your own—the opportunity." And why? "Because the days are evil." S. Paul's teaching is that we are not merely to be on the

¹ Eph. v. 15, 16.

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lookout for opportunities of serving God and our fellow-men, of developing character and winning heaven, when all things around us are bright and prosperous, but especially when the days are evil, when the times are out of joint, when difficulties beset us, and everything is at its worst. That, he says, is the opportunity which you are to redeem.

Now, every stage of life has its own opportunities —youth, manhood, and old age. Youth is the time for training the faculties and for developing character while it is easily moulded. Manhood is the time for life's special work. And old age, has it not also its opportunities? They are not as brilliant, perhaps, as those of manhood, but still important—opportunities of glorifying God by suffering patiently, by influencing others; opportunities of strengthening, developing, and beautifying our own character for eternity; opportunities of putting, as it were, the last touches to those works upon which we have been all our lives engaged; opportunities of prayer and meditation, of learning more about God from Holy Scripture and the writings of the saints; opportunities of preparing for death—and then, besides these, opportunities still of working for others, of influencing them by our words and acts, and, above all, by the example of holy living.

How precious these opportunities should be in our sight, when we consider that they are among the last which will be vouchsafed to us in this life!

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In ■ sense, there will be no opportunities in heaven, because heaven will be an unending state of perfection. There will be no *time* in heaven, and therefore no opportunity. There we shall always be able to do our work of praising God, for we shall praise Him without ceasing. We shall no longer be able to influence others, because all in heaven will be perfect, and, like ourselves, will be engaged in the same ceaseless service of God. We must, therefore, use to the utmost, opportunities which are left to us in this world. Let us consider some of those we have already enumerated ; and, first, the opportunity of prayer.

I shall not here say anything of prayer as a help to the spiritual life, because that will belong to a subsequent chapter, but, rather, I will draw attention to the fact that opportunities for prayer are opportunities for learning a science—perhaps we should say a language, for prayer is the language in which we speak to God—for learning a language which will not only be of great use to us in our life in this world, but in our life in eternity.

We must not confine prayer merely to the making known to God of our needs. For we shall find that those who have prayed best amongst the saints have had very few needs to bring before God. A great saint, S. Francis de Sales, said, "I have but few needs, and those I do not need very much." And in this he was simply putting into words the experience of most of the saints. There

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are, of course, times of great temptation, or of serious danger, when we have great needs to bring before the throne of grace ; but, ordinarily, the greater part of our prayers should be devoted to telling God of our love for Him, and asking Him to make us more pleasing in His sight.

Prayer, whether mental or verbal, is the instrument of our intercourse with God. What should we think of a friend, in poorer circumstances than ourselves, whom we had often helped, but who never came to see us except when he wanted to ask us some favour ? Should we not doubt the sincerity of his friendship ? Should we not be tempted to think that he cared for us only for what he got out of us. May we not apply this to our intercourse with God. If we never come into His presence in prayer, except to ask Him for something, is not that reducing our prayers to a very selfish level ? Prayer is the language in which the soul speaks to God. We may therefore say that it is the language of heaven. Have we nothing to say to God, nothing to tell God except our own selfish wants ?

In one sense, it is very simple to pray ; in another, it is very difficult. We shall see this if we pursue the analogy of a foreign language which we are learning. We may learn, in a very short time, enough to make known our wants in travelling. But if we desire to learn to speak the language fluently, to understand its genius and possibilities,

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and to make ourselves familiar with its literature, we must devote to it not only many hours of study, but many years.

It is so with prayer. It is the language of heaven, of that country where we hope to make our home in eternity; the language of the great King, our Father in heaven. Is it not, therefore, worth while to learn it as thoroughly as we can whilst we have the opportunity in this world, in order that our intercourse with God may be as perfect as possible both here and hereafter?

In learning a language we have to master its grammar, its vocabulary, and its idioms. And then after we have done all this, we need constant opportunities of speaking the language, that we may exercise ourselves in it. So with prayer. There is a great deal to be learned about prayer from the works of spiritual writers—its grammar, its vocabulary, its idioms. But, after all, these are but theories, compared with the practice of prayer, which can only be mastered by frequently exercising ourselves in the divine art. We have been learning to pray all our lives, and yet most of us are very sensible that we pray but poorly. What, then, shall we do in our advancing years? Two things—ask for the aid of the Holy Spirit, Whose work it is to help our infirmities in prayer, teaching us both how to pray and what to pray for—and devote a great deal of time to the practice of prayer.

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This is a matter which we should consider very seriously, and we should ask ourselves, Am I using to the full all the opportunities of prayer which old age gives? Those engaged in active work have comparatively little time for prayer, but those whose days are at their own disposal are able to devote a great deal more time to this great duty. And we should examine ourselves, whether we are using our opportunity in this to the full extent, for the closeness of our communion with God depends, not a little, upon our cultivation of the habit of prayer.

Then there is the opportunity of learning about God and His revelation to man. As in the case of prayer, we ought to be using this opportunity all our life, for our knowledge of God in eternity will depend upon our capacity for knowing Him, and that capacity depends upon development in this life. There is a period of growth in the mind of a child and a young man. But when a certain age is reached, the mind attains its full development. And if before that period it be dwarfed or undeveloped, there are many things which that person can never learn or comprehend.

So it is with us. The period of growth is our life in this world. During this period we develop a certain capacity for comprehending the things of heaven. And we have no reason to suppose that in eternity there will be any further increase of the capacity, although there will be the most

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marvellous exercise of all the gifts which have been developed.

From this point of view we may look upon old age as the last opportunity for increasing the capacity of knowing about God and His revelation to man. And therefore we should use the opportunity with great diligence. We know about God and His revelation chiefly by a careful study of the Bible and of works written to elucidate it. But it is not enough merely to read the Bible and to study these works ; we must really so meditate upon them as to make what we read a very part of our own mind. We must not be content merely with knowing *about* God ; but, from knowing about Him, we must come to know Him. And in proportion as we do this shall we be fitted to gaze into the full revelation of God's glory in the beatific vision.

Another way in which we may come to a knowledge of God is by the study of the lives and writings of the saints. We may see how God revealed Himself to those holy men and women, and how they, in a degree, reflected what they saw of God's glory. If we are to learn of God's revelation to man, there is no way in which we can learn it better than in the lives and writings of the saints. For instance, who can read "The Imitation of Christ" of S. Thomas à Kempis, without feeling that they know more of God's revelation than before? Or who can read the life of S. Francis

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Assisi without more clearly seeing God reflected in all nature, as S. Francis saw Him?

Then, lastly, we must remember that in old age we still have opportunities of influencing others both by our words and examples, so that we must be very watchful over our words, that we may wield a right influence by their means; and very careful of our example, that it may lead those who follow it in the right path.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Helps of Old Age.

The Realisation of God's Presence.



E have considered some of the faults, virtues, and opportunities of old age. Let us now turn to some of its helps which God has placed within our reach. They are many; but perhaps the most conspicuous is the cultivation and continuous realisation of His presence.

At a great crisis in Abraham's life, God appeared unto him and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect."¹ In these words God revealed to the patriarch the purpose and end of his life—that he was to become perfect. And our Blessed Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, gives us a similar injunction—"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect."²

At first, the thought that we must be perfect is

¹ Genesis xvii. 1.

² S. Matt. v. 48.

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likely to stagger us; but it is partly because most of us have very inaccurate views of perfection. Perfection in God is, of course, absolute; but in a creature it is relative, that is, it is nothing more nor less than the fulfilment of its Creator's purpose, and so does not necessarily imply anything very elaborate or highly developed. In the case of man's handiwork ■ thing is perfect which fulfils its maker's purpose. And in this sense a needle is more perfect, probably, than the most highly elaborated and intricate piece of machinery. For the very fact that a needle has changed but little through many ages, being simply a bar of steel, pierced at one end and pointed at the other, implies that it was from the beginning perfect, in that it adequately fulfilled the purpose for which it was made. Machinery, however, is always being changed and developed; and if we take the complex machinery which drives the locomotive of an express train, the fact that it is constantly being improved upon and altered shows that it does not fully come up to the purpose for which it was made.

Hence, in an individual we must not think that perfection is a development of great intellectual powers; or, indeed, that the perfection of any two souls is the same. God has a purpose for each one Whom He creates; and if that person fulfils God's purpose, he attains his perfection. Hence, perfection is possible to all those who surrender themselves

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to God's Will, using the means of grace which God has provided, and seizing the opportunities which He has placed in their path.

When God said to Abraham, "Be thou perfect," He intimated the reason or cause why man must be perfect; for He said, "I am the Almighty God." He reminded Abraham of His attribute of Omnipotence—that He was The Almighty. Now the creatures of man's hands fail to fulfil the purpose for which they are made, on account of man's want of power. But an Almighty Being cannot create a thing which is imperfect; that is to say, which cannot fulfil His purpose; for that would imply lack of power on the part of Almighty, which is unthinkable. Because God is Almighty, therefore man must be what God means him to be. God, however, does not mean all men to be the same. But taking into account a man's opportunities, the grace which God gives, and the gifts which He bestows upon him, there is a certain standard which each man can reach, which God means him to reach, and which is his perfection.

But, in order to reach this perfection, God reminds Abraham that he must walk before Him—"I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." The means by which perfection is to be attained is, according to this text, a realisation of God's presence, that is, walking before God.

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We must not, however, be satisfied to regard this merely as ■ means of perfection, but we must strive to realise that it is in itself the very life of heaven. For here on earth we walk before God by faith, but in heaven we walk in the full sight of His presence. Here our Blessed Lord is veiled in His Sacrament; there the veil will be lifted, and we shall see Him face to face. The chief joy to which we look forward in heaven is the beatific vision. But the beatific vision is simply the walking before God in all the glory of His unveiled presence.

Those whose years are drawing to a close must feel themselves very near, in point of time, to entering into this unveiled presence of God. They are living, as it were, in the very antechamber of the great King, waiting at any moment to be called to His presence. Surely, they should cultivate a spirit of recollection, should remember where they are.

It is not only, however, the aged, but *all* should feel that the realisation of God's presence is both their safeguard and their joy in this life. There is a sentence of Holy Scripture which is often upon our lips—"Thou God seest me."¹ But how few realise the circumstances under which it was uttered, or even the person who spoke it! Was it some great saint, like Abraham, the friend of God? Or was it Moses, the great Law-giver,

¹ Genesis xvi. 13.

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who led God's chosen people through the wilderness? Or David, the sweet Psalm-singer, the man after God's own heart? No; for, if it had been, it would have been of but little comfort to us. For we might have thought and said, Yes, God cares for great saints; God sees them always, because they are so great, and good, and holy; but does He care for me? Does He watch over one who is so insignificant and sinful as I am? The answer is best found by studying the context of the passage, "Thou God seest me." Who was it who uttered it? A poor, Egyptian slave girl, fleeing from the wrath of her mistress, who had treated her cruelly. She had run away from home, run off into the wilderness—perhaps to die. For what could a poor girl do alone in a great wilderness? She ran away; and, coming to a well of water, sat down there in her misery, and an angel from God came to her, and told her to return and submit herself to her mistress; and promised her, as ■ reward, that she should have a son, who should be the founder of a great nation. That is, the angel told her to go back and do her duty in the state of life unto which God's providence had called her; told her to take up her cross, to bear her trials, not to run away from them; and that her reward should be that a poor slave should be the mōther of a mighty nation. That promise was made nearly four thousand years ago; and to-day, wherever we find Arabs

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wandering through the deserts of Egypt, and Syria, and Arabia, we see this fulfilment; for Hagar's son Ishmael was the founder of the Arabian nation.

What a great lesson Hagar teaches us—the lesson of God's watchful providence, of His tireless eye always upon us, of His tender care for us; so that even the sorrows of a poor slave girl did not escape His notice! Indeed, one of those bright spirits who wait around His throne is sent to comfort and strengthen Hagar, to tell her what to do, and to promise her a great reward.

Surely, these words, then, ought to be full of comfort to us; for, however poor, or humble, or sinful, we may be, we can hardly be worse off than Hagar was; but God saw her sorrows, and therefore He sees ours, and is ready (if only we ask Him in prayer to help us.)

This thought of God's presence is a great check to us in temptation. It imposes a restraint upon our thoughts when we give way to uncharitable or discontented thoughts. For, as the Psalmist teaches us to say, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me out, and known me: Thou knowest my down-sitting, and mine up-rising; Thou understandest my thoughts long before."¹ The whole of this Psalm has for its subject God's presence. It is, therefore, one that we should often read and reflect upon.

¹ Psalm cxxxix. 1.

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The realisation of God's presence ought also to be a check to our words when we are tempted to speak unadvisedly with our lips, to say what is untrue or unkind. And then it should be a restraint also upon our actions. When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife, it was the recollection of God's presence which saved him; for he said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"¹ It was the recollection of God's presence which strengthened him in the moment of temptation.

But not only is the realisation of God's presence a check upon us in temptation; it is also a comfort to us in all the great difficulties of life. In serious trial, what a help it is to think, not only that God knows of our trial, but that He is watching us; not merely watching to see how we will meet it, but ready at once to send help to enable us to bear it, if only we will cry to Him for help. At such times we should say the 121st Psalm:—"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh even from the Lord, Who hath made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and He that keepeth thee will not sleep. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Then, too, in sorrow and bereavement, what a comfort to think that God knows it all; that the

¹ Genesis xxxix. 9.

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human heart of Jesus Christ sympathizes with us in our affliction ; that He Who wept at the grave of Lazarus knows what our sorrow is, and is ready to help us with the consolations of His grace !

And lastly, in that trial which the aged especially have to bear—the trial of loneliness ; loneliness from the loss of friends who have gone before, and loneliness from being left without companionship—what ■ comfort then is the sympathy of Christ ; for we are never so little alone as when we are without human companionship, but alone with our Lord ! If we read the story of His life in the Gospels, we cannot but observe how lonely He was, lonely even when surrounded by crowds ; for there were none who understood Him, none who entirely sympathized with Him in His mission. And so when we are lonely, the thought of our Lord's presence should be our consolation ; the thought of our Lord's sympathy should rob our loneliness of all its bitterness.

No help, then, can be greater in our spiritual life than this—to cultivate the sense that we are in the very antechamber of heaven, waiting to be ushered into God's presence. He sees us now, and soon we shall see Him. And therefore we must be ever striving to realise now our nearness to Him, to realise now that our life is lived beneath His loving eye.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Prayer.

NEXT to the realisation of God's presence comes prayer as the most universal help in the spiritual life. Some, perhaps, might even assign to it the first place, but we shall give it the second, because prayer depends so much for its power upon our realisation of God's presence.

Since we have already drawn attention to the fact that old age is a great, and indeed the last, opportunity for learning to pray well, we shall now rather treat of prayer itself. We have likened prayer to the language of heaven, the tongue in which we hold converse with God. We might liken it also to the atmosphere which the soul breathes, since we might as well expect to find a living man who does not breathe, as a living soul that does not pray.

But, while prayer is so intimately bound up with our spiritual life, that it is like the air which the soul breathes, yet there are a very large number of persons whose spiritual life languishes because they pray so badly. In hot climates people are

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subject to a very insidious disease which is called malaria, and is the result of breathing air which has become impregnated with exhalations from the soil. Malaria does not often actually destroy life, but it saps their energies and enfeebles their health.

Similarly, bad prayer does not, like mortal sin, kill the soul, but it robs the spiritual life of all joy, and makes us feeble and very imperfect Christians. Malaria, as we have said, results from breathing in the noxious exhalations of the soil. Spiritual malaria, bad prayers, may often be traced to an atmosphere of worldliness which pervades our prayers. It is to be overcome by thoughtful preparation for the act of prayer.

I do not mean that we cannot often raise our hearts to God in prayer without any preparation, but that our stated periods of prayer ought to be carefully prepared for. And preparation should be twofold—first, carefully closing the door of our soul to all worldly thoughts and interests; to plans of work; to thoughts of friends; to all that is alien to the spirit of prayer. This is the negative preparation. Then there is a positive preparation—the tuning, so to speak, of the chords of the soul, that they may be meet for the utterance of the language of heaven. This is effected by an Act of the presence of God. We may make this Act in many ways, but perhaps the simplest is the thoughtful use of the invocation of the Holy

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Trinity, with which most people begin their prayers—"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." I say, the *thoughtful* use of this invocation in its relation to prayer; for a thoughtless utterance of it is valueless.

"In the Name of the Father." I am about to speak to my Father, Who is in heaven; Who, because He is Omniscient, knows all my needs; because He is Omnipotent, can help me to the uttermost; and, because He is Love, *will* help me. I am God's child; and a child naturally makes known his wants to his father.

"And of the Son." That which gives my prayer its efficacy with the Father is the merits of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, Who has said, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you."¹ And, more than this, there is in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ, Who ever liveth to make intercession for us.²

"And of the Holy Ghost." In my own soul, to help my infirmities, to teach me how to pray as I ought, is the Holy Spirit. He too makes intercession for me,³ not in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, but in my own soul, by inspiring me with longings after God, which can scarcely find utterance in words.

¹ S. John xvi. 23. ² Cf. Hebrews vii. 25; Romans viii. 34.

³ Cf. Romans viii. 26.

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Some thoughts like these will help to place us in the right attitude for prayer, will aid us to realise the presence of God, upon which the power of our prayer so largely depends.

Then in regard to the prayer itself—what is it? It is the uplifting of the soul to God, the ladder by which we climb up to heaven. “Unto Thee, O Lord, will I lift up my soul,”¹ may be regarded as the inspired definition of prayer. The great model of prayer is, of course, the “Our Father.” But if we desire to know how to meet the difficulties of prayer—and they are indeed many—we may study our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane.

Some people think that prayer is an easy thing; and sometimes it is easy to pray. But very often real prayer requires a great struggle to overcome weariness, coldness, and the various obstacles in our own nature, not to speak of those difficulties which Satan puts in our way when we desire to pray. Our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane is ■ wonderful example of this. It was not easy for Him to pray then; for He had weighing upon Him all the sins of the world, for which He was about to make atonement; and before Him, the horrors of Calvary, the passion which He was about to suffer for our sakes. He entered into the Garden of Gethsemane for the purpose of praying. And if we study His actions there, we may, I think, learn six great lessons in regard to prayer.

■ Psalm xxv. 1.

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I. First, that prayer must always be associated with watching; for Jesus said to His disciples again and again, "Watch and pray." Prayer without watching is hypocrisy, as watching without prayer is presumption. We cannot rightly *pray* to be delivered from impending temptation, unless we really mean to watch against it; for this would be hypocrisy. So, too, we cannot *watch* against temptation aright, unless we also pray for grace to meet it; for that would be presumption. To pray without watching, then, is hypocrisy; for it is to ask God for grace, and then not to use the grace given. And to watch without praying is presumption; for it is to meet difficulties in our own unaided strength.

II. Then we are told that our Lord tore Himself away about a stone's cast from the three disciples whom He had chosen to watch and pray with Him. I say, "tore Himself away;" for the Greek words, "And He was *withdrawn* from them about a stone's cast,"¹ signify this. May we not learn here that we cannot really pray, if we are leaning upon the sympathy of the world, even though it be the sympathy of friendship? Prayer must be an appeal to the sympathy of God alone. Even though our Blessed Lord took with Him three of His disciples to be the witnesses of His agony, and to watch and pray with Him, He tore Himself

¹ S. Luke xxii. 41 (*ἀπεσπάσθη*)

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away from them when He was about to make His own prayer to God.

III. We read that Jesus "kneeled down, and prayed." S. Matthew tells us, He "fell on His face"; S. Mark, that He "fell on the ground"; S. Luke, that He "kneeled down, and prayed." How often prayer is spoiled by the comfortable attitudes which we choose for our prayers. A pillow upon which we can rest our arms is a great help, undoubtedly—to sleepiness—but not to prayer. In Gethsemane our Lord had only the hard ground to kneel upon, and the gnarled roots of the olive trees for His *prie-dieu*. If we are to pray aright, we must use constraint in regard to our bodies. When the body is most at ease, the Spirit often has the least control. How often we complain of distracting thoughts, or of sleepiness in prayer! A very simple remedy, and generally an effectual one, is to kneel upright or in some constrained attitude when we feel sleepy. Our Lord teaches us in Gethsemane the law of reverence and of humility of attitude in prayer. Some persons think they can say their prayers just as well sitting or lying down. And in the case of those who are sick or infirm, this is of course perfectly right. But for those who are not compelled by weakness of body, it is quite without excuse.

IV. S. Luke tells us that, "being in an agony He prayed more earnestly." An agony means ■

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great struggle. Many of us know in a small way what it is to struggle in prayer, when our nature seems averse to prayer, and we cannot find words to say, cannot keep our thoughts fixed, when our very body seems to rebel against us. Then, if we are to pray, there must be a real struggle. What do we generally do under such circumstances? Give it up, saying, "I cannot pray now!" What did our Lord do? "Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly;" and the word translated "earnestly" really means "intensely." If we are to pray aright, we must not only pray when we find it easy to address God; but when it is difficult, we must pray with all our might, with earnestness and intensity.

V. Our Lord teaches us a fifth lesson in the words, "My Father, all things are possible to Thee." In this short sentence we have brought together the two great underlying forces of prayer—confidence and love. We cannot pray aright unless we believe and realise God's Omnipotence. "All things are possible to Thee." Prayer rests upon a foundation of trust in God; and trust is the supreme expression of our belief in God's Omnipotence—that He can do all things. Confidence, trust in God; and then love—*My Father*; not merely Father, but *My Father*. What treasures of love these words express! So in our prayers we must not only have confidence that God hears, and that God can help us; but that God loves us,

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loves to answer our prayer, to supply our needs. We must pray with confidence and love.

VI. Then our Lord says, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." Resignation is the sixth lesson in prayer which our Lord teaches us. It has been said that perseverance, with resignation, is the condition of all good prayer. We need to persevere, as the woman of Canaan persevered in her intercession for her child; and yet we must always say, "Thy will be done."

Prayer is the exercise of the supernatural virtue of hope; and hope is the spring of all human action. A watch may be constructed with great perfection, and the works may be in perfect order; but if you do not wind it up it will not go. So prayer is the winding up of the mechanism of our nature, the generating of the store of forces by which our work is to be done. God gives His grace in response to prayer; so that prayer really enables us to do what God wills us to do. What a wonderful power the mere natural virtue of hope is in life! And how much greater is the supernatural virtue of hope; the mainspring, so to speak, of our spiritual life, which is wound up by prayer.

Our subject is an inexhaustible one; but there is just one other thought which we must not pass over, and that is the joy of prayer. We have spoken of our Lord's prayer in Gethsemane, when the clouds of human sin were rolling in upon His soul! Let us turn to a very different scene—the

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Mount of the Transfiguration. There another cloud rolls over our Blessed Lord. It is not the cloud of sin, but of glory of the Holy Ghost; and we read that, "as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered."¹ His face was lighted up with the rays of divine Light from that Communion with God, His very raiment became white and glistering. And these rays of brightness lingered on Him when He came down from the mountain, so that the people, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed.

Prayer is often a great struggle, but sometimes it is an intense joy; a lighting up, as it were, of our whole nature with the clouds of God's glory, and a strengthening of us for the work which God has for us to do.

¹ S. Luke ix. 29.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

Intercessory Prayer.



HERE is one special kind of prayer which, while it is obligatory on all Christians, ought to have ■ peculiar attraction for the aged—I mean intercessory prayer. They are, from the circumstances of their life, shut off from much active work for Christ and His Church. But there is one work which they can do better, perhaps, than others, which in importance and dignity probably transcends all active work; and that is the work of praying for others, the work of intercession. Samuel tells us that its neglect (and, alas! how terribly it is neglected!) is sin; for he said to the ungrateful Israelites, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."¹ S. Paul writes to the Colossians, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you."² And S. James tells us that, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," and instances the prayers of Elijah, which

¹ 1 Samuel xii. 23. [■] Col. i. 9; cf. Ephes. i. 15, 16.

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resulted in the three years' drought, and afterwards in the rain which restored to the earth its fertility.¹

But greatest of all arguments for intercessory prayer is the fact that it is the one work of our Lord in His life of glory in heaven, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us.² No duty, then, can be more plain, more urgent ; but, alas ! probably no duty is more neglected !

Charity—love—is the greatest of all virtues ; and the work of intercessory prayer is essentially a work of charity. The love of our Lord Jesus Christ was manifested especially in two ways—on earth, when He suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps ;³ in heaven, in His continual work of intercession for us. S. Peter tells us that, “hereunto were ye called ;” that is, to follow in the steps of Christ’s suffering. And again, and again, and again, we are reminded that we are called upon to join in our Lord’s work of intercession. The great act of intercession is, of course, the offering of the Holy Eucharist for the needs of those for whom we intercede. But, besides this, we should devote a certain part of every day, if possible, to praying for others.

We should realise the necessity of intercession when we consider that the work of Christ’s Church

¹ Cf. S. James v. 16-18.

² Cf. Hebrews vii. 25 ; ix. 24 ; Romans viii. 34.

³ Cf. S. Peter ii. 21.

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militant here on earth cannot go on without it. The Church in this world is called the Church militant because it is continually fighting against the power of the Evil One. And this is typified by the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites, of which we read in the Book of Exodus. Then Joshua led the Israelites against the enemy, while Moses stood on the mountain-top with his hands uplifted in prayer. And as long as his hands were uplifted, the Israelites prevailed; but when from weariness he let down his hands, Amalek prevailed. So that Aaron and Hur stayed up the hands of Moses, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, until the going down of the sun, and the victory over Amalek was complete.¹

Primarily, this, of course, typifies our Lord's intercession in heaven, whilst His Church is fighting against the powers of evil on earth. But it is true also of each Christian who joins in that work of intercession, and they should realise that the power of the Church, both at home and in the mission fields—indeed, in all her struggles against evil—depends upon the intercession of her Lord and the members of His Church, both in heaven and on earth.

The dignity of intercession is brought home to us when we remember that it is the one work of our Blessed Lord in His life of glory in heaven. That we are permitted, by virtue of our union

¹ Cf. Exodus xvii. 8-13.

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with Him, to share in this work, ought to be recognised by us as a great privilege as well as an important duty.

Then, too, its efficacy is revealed to us again and again in the history of God's saints, both in the Bible and in the Church. In the Bible we find Abraham interceding for the cities of the plain;¹ Moses interceding for the rebellious Israelites; and Elijah, for the removal of the drought.² Ezekiel, also, speaks of Noah, Daniel, and Job, as especially powerful in intercession with God.³ But these are only ■ few cases out of many.

The history of the Church, too, affords numberless instances of the efficacy of intercession. And even though our prayers for others should sometimes fail of their purpose, through the impenitence of those for whom we pray, they will surely return again to our own bosom, with blessing upon ourselves.⁴

If our intercessions are to be thoroughly effective, they should be definite and systematic. And for this end it is helpful to make ■ list of persons and works for which we desire to pray, and to assign the various subjects of intercession to different days of the week. To have such a list written out will help us day by day to recall the works and persons for whom we wish to intercede. We might begin with our relations, natural and spiritual;

¹ Cf. Genesis xviii. 23-33.

² Cf. ■ Kings xviii. 41-46.

³ Cf. Ezek. xiv. 14, 16, 18, 20.

⁴ Cf. S. Luke x. 5, 6.

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then our own Communion and its various needs; our own Parish and its different works; but, of course, not forgetting the needs and work of the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world.

Again, there are different classes for whom we ought to pray—all who are unconverted, that they may turn to God; those in mortal sin, that they may be brought to repentance; those in great temptation, that they may have grace to resist; those in sorrow or distress, that God may comfort them; those who have doubts in regard to the Faith, that the Holy Spirit may enlighten them.

One great division of our intercessions will be devoted to the heathen, and therefore, to all the missionary work of the Church throughout the world, and especially to certain missions in which we have an individual interest. We should think of the millions of altars of human hearts on which the fire of the love of God has never been kindled; and, worse still, of those altars on which it once burned, but has gone out. Another division will be the various individuals for whom we have promised to pray. These are, of course, only intended as hints; since each person will naturally have his or her own subjects of intercession.

We might, perhaps, have treated this subject under "The Opportunities of Old Age," but it seems to arrange itself better as one of the kinds of prayer which are helps to the spiritual life;

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for intercession is not only necessary, that the agencies of the Church may be effective, but it is also full of blessing on those who give themselves especially to this great work of charity.

CHAPTER XXV.

Meditation.



MONG the helps in the spiritual life, none, except the sacraments, is greater than meditation, or mental prayer, by which we not only hold communion with God, but in that communion exercise all the principal powers of the soul upon divine truth. Meditation is the exercise, chiefly, of the memory, intellect, and will; but the imagination and affections are also brought into play, the Holy Ghost kindling, enlightening, and inspiring these powers. The end or purpose of meditation is fellowship with God; for in it we hear His voice and respond to His revelation of Himself.

While this is the true end of meditation, there are other results produced by it, which, though they are secondary, are of great importance. For instance: meditation enables us to speak of divine truth with greater intelligence, and so to teach others. It helps us to engage in our devotions with greater fervour; and so is an aid to prayer.

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It supplies us with reasons for avoiding sin, for resisting temptation, for enduring patiently our trials; and so aids us in the struggles of life.

Most people, however, will say: Is not meditation very difficult? Yes, it is difficult to meditate on heavenly things. But meditation in itself is not difficult; for we are practising it constantly in regard to the interests of the world. Meditation is, as I have said, primarily the exercise of the memory, intellect, and will, together with the imagination and affections. But how easy we find it to exercise these with respect to the things which belong to our life in this world! Our memory—how delightful it is to recall the pleasant things of the past! Our imagination—to dwell on the scenes in which we have played a prominent part, or even to picture ourselves in positions which we are never likely to occupy; positions in which our own self-love is gratified by the homage we receive or the success we attain. How easy it is to imagine ourselves saying brilliant things, attracting the notice of others, receiving compliments! And then our intellect—how busy it always is, thinking over plans of work, schemes to accomplish our own ends! And our will—every action of our life depends upon the will, and therefore it is continually being exercised. And our affections—they go out to certain persons and things constantly, and are repelled by others. And this is meditation—

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but meditation on the things of this world. It is very easy, and very pleasant, and almost everyone practises it in some form or other many times a day.

It is only when we come to meditate on the Word of God, that we find the work difficult. So that we see the difficulty is not in meditating, but in the subject upon which we meditate. Meditation on the things of God is the training these various faculties of our soul to contemplate divine truth. And this is difficult, chiefly because those faculties are weak, on account of lack of exercise in this direction. It is very much as when those who have been long confined in a dark room suddenly go out into the bright sunlight. Their eyes are too weak to endure the glare. But the eyes of those who live an outdoor life do not suffer, because they are accustomed to the sunlight. So that we see it is largely a matter of training of the faculties of the soul to contemplate God's light and truth. And to stimulate us in the work of meditation, we must remember that we are training these faculties for eternity: In heaven, the joy of the intellect will be to drink in the glories of the beatific vision of God; but its capacity for doing this will depend very much upon its training in this world, and especially its training, through meditation upon divine truth. If we cannot now keep our minds from wandering when we think of God and His

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revelation, should we not fear lest, when we see God in all His glory in the beatific vision, we may be incapable of apprehending much of that glory?

Then again, we shall not only see God in heaven, but we shall love Him. And this love will be the perfect act of our will and the full exercise of our affections. But if our will is now so weak in regard to the things of God, and our affections have so little taste for them that we cannot even spend ■ quarter of an hour in meditating upon God's Word, how can we expect in heaven to have the capacity which we have not striven to develop here on earth?

In meditation we train the ear to hear God's voice. God's voice sometimes speaks through the thunders of Sinai, but in meditation it is more often like the "still small voice" in which He spoke to His prophet of old.¹ If, then, we are to be able to recognise the whispers of His voice, we must train our ear to listen intently to it. We must therefore make ■ perfect silence in our soul by shutting out all other voices, and exercise the faculty of attention to catch the faintest whisper that God vouchsafes to us. When, therefore, the ear has thus been trained to hear God's voice, it will teach the spiritual eye to see the things of God and of heaven.

Meditation differs from the study of God's

¹ Cf. ■ Kings xix. 12, 13.

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Word; for in study the intellect is *active* and investigates truth, while in meditation it is rather *passive*, listening for God to reveal it. Study supplies the food which meditation digests. In study we gather the material which the soul, by meditation, assimilates to itself; for there is the greatest difference between a mere intellectual knowledge of truth and a moral grasp of it.

Meditation is best practised on some portions of God's Word; though we can also meditate on the doctrines or mysteries of the Faith, on Christian virtues; or, indeed, on anything connected with the soul's life.

For a fuller instruction on the divine art of meditation, the reader is referred to one of the many treatises on this subject.¹ Here we shall only draw attention to a few salient points. We should begin with the exercise of the imagination, placing before us some scene with which the subject is connected. For instance: in meditating on one of our Lord's miracles or parables, we should begin by putting before us the occasion, the actors, the various circumstances. Then we should pass on to the use of the memory, recalling what we know about the subject, what we have read about it. After this the intellect begins its work in considering the subject as it applies to our own soul's life. And lastly, the

¹ The Author would venture to refer to his "Helps to Meditation," published by Longmans, Green, & Co.

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will should form some resolution by which the lesson of the meditation may be carried into effect. We may sum up the exercise of the memory, intellect, and will, in meditation, under the three questions : What have I to remember, consider, and resolve, in regard to this ?

Our meditation should be interspersed with colloquies or addresses to our Lord, with prayers and acts of love. Above all, we must realise that the meditation will be useless if we do not carry it out, so to speak, in our daily lives. To hear God's voice day by day, and not to obey it, would only increase our condemnation. But to listen, and to strive to live by the teachings of that voice, will enable us to grow greatly in spiritual power. So that no soul can rightly practise meditation without making great progress in spiritual life. And lastly, we must never forget that in meditation we are training our souls to take their place in the divine choirs in eternity, to do their work in praising God before His throne for ever and ever.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Penitence.

NE Chapter III. we treated of one of the most important aspects of penitence—that satisfaction for sin, which enables us to bear with patience its temporal consequences during our life in this world, and which therefore leads us to accept with humble submission the penances which God in His love and justice sends us now. But in treating of the helps of the spiritual life we must not pass over one so important as penitence without a fuller consideration of its other aspects.

We have all sinned, and Christ Himself has said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."¹ He was, of course, referring to those mortal sins which cut the soul off from God. For both Holy Scripture and the Church, and, indeed, our own common-sense, teach us that there are two kinds of sin—those which destroy grace in the soul, and those lesser offences which, while they do not destroy grace, or, indeed, even diminish it, yet are

¹ S. Luke xiii. 3 and 5.

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unpleasing to God. S. John teaches this in the words, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is ■ sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."¹

In theological language we speak of mortal and venial sin, the latter word meaning a sin which is pardonable, that is, which God will pardon if we ask Him in prayer. Mortal sin, however, requires something more than prayer, as is implied in this passage of S. John. It requires a very definite act of penitence that it may be forgiven.

Penitence consists, as we well know, of three parts —Contribution, Confession, and Satisfaction, of which the first is the most important, since it is the root from which the others spring. We cannot repent at all unless we are truly sorry for our sin. And when I say "truly sorry," I mean sorry with that godly sorrow which S. Paul contrasts with the sorrow of the world.² Godly sorrow is a sorrow which springs from the love of God, from the thought that we have offended God and outraged His love. This leads to true penitence. Worldly sorrow is merely sorrow for the consequences of our sin, for the rewards we have forfeited, or the penalties we have incurred by sinning.

If our penitence have for its root this godly

¹ S. John v. 16, 17.

² Cf. ■ Cor. vii. 10, 11.

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sorrow of Contrition, the first fruit which it should produce will be Confession, the second part of penitence. And what is Confession? It is the telling of our sins to God. Some may say, Does not God know our sins without our telling Him; know them, indeed, better than we know them ourselves? Yes; but God has commanded ■ to confess our sins, and therefore we must do so. Besides, we might just ■ well argue against prayer, that God knows our needs, and does not require that we shall tell Him, and yet He has commanded us to pray.

Without confession of sin, there can be no forgiveness. S. John writes, "If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."¹ And the inference is, that if we do not confess our sins, we must not expect to be forgiven. If we desire the *assurance* of God's pardon through Absolution, we shall confess our sins to God in the presence of ■ Priest; for our Prayer Book tells us in the daily service that God has "given power, and commandment, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins."

Confession to God in the presence of His minister is found throughout the Bible, and is enjoined especially in two places in the Prayer Book. For example: it was part of the Jewish Law, as we

¹ 1 S. John i. 9.

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read in many places in the Old Testament.¹ We also find it in the New Testament practised by S. John Baptist² and S. Paul,³ and taught in many other places. Then, too, in the parable of the prodigal son, which is an instance of the freest intercourse of the soul with God, while the son says to his father, "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son,"⁴ he makes this confession apparently before his father's servants, to whom the command is given, "Bring forth the first robe, and put it on him." The "first robe" represents that robe of baptismal innocence which we forfeit by sin, and which is restored to us through penitence. The father in the parable, however, does not himself put the robe upon his penitent son, but commands his servants to do this. So our Prayer Book teaches that God has "given power, and *commandment*, to His Ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins."

There are two places in the Prayer Book besides this, in which particular Confession to ■ Priest, to be followed by Absolution, is recommended—the one with which we are all so familiar, in the Exhortation in the Office for the Holy Communion: "And because it is requisite, that no man should

¹ Cf. Levit. v. 5, 6; Numbers v. 6-8; Joshua vii. 19; ■ Samuel xii. 13, etc.

■ Cf. S. Matt. iii. 6.

■ Acts xix. 18.

■ S. Luke xv. 21.

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come to the Holy Communion, but with ■ full trust in God's mercy, and with a quiet conscience ; therefore if there be any of you, who by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort or counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief ; that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness."

The other is in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, in which we find the following rubric and form of Absolution : "Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special Confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it) after this sort.

"Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath left power to His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him, of His great mercy forgive thee thine offences : And by His authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

What gives to this latter its special force is that the Office for the Visitation of the Sick contains the only direction in the Prayer Book for a Priest in dealing with an individual soul, and that the form of

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Absolution given there is so very strong and clear. In our Church, however, it is left to the judgment of each individual to use or not to use this Sacramental Confession; that is to say, the responsibility rests on the individual and not on the Priest, whose only duty is to move the man to make his Confession if he need it.

The second fruit which springs from the root of Contrition is Satisfaction, of which we have treated somewhat fully in Chapter III. Let us not, however, forget that the most important part of the work of penitence is Contrition. Where can we learn it? At the foot of the Cross, where all the saints learned it; for the Passion is God's revelation of how great is the malice of sin. And who can meditate upon our Lord dying upon the Cross for our sins without feeling a sorrow which flows from the love of Him, and leads us to make our penitence as perfect as we can in all its parts?

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Holy Communion.



Holy Communion is, of course, the greatest of all helps to the spiritual life. But as its adequate treatment would require ■ volume in itself, and most of us have Manuals on the Holy Communion, we shall merely suggest ■ few thoughts in connection with this great mystery.

What is the Holy Communion? It is the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, present under the forms of bread and wine. It is His real Body, which the Catechism teaches is verily and indeed taken and received in the Holy Communion. It is the same Body Which was born of the Virgin Mary, and died upon the Cross. For no one can have more than one body; and if it be our Lord's Body, it must therefore be the same that He had when He was on earth. But it is not under the same conditions; it is now glorified; and it is not present naturally, or locally, but supernaturally, supra-locally. Naturally and locally

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our Lord's Body is only in one place—in heaven; as we say in the Creed, "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty." He is present in the Holy Eucharist, sacramentally, but none the less really. He is present, Body, Soul, and Divinity; for these are inseparable from the glorified Body of Jesus Christ.

The first purpose or end for which the Holy Eucharist was instituted, is that we may offer to the Eternal Father our Lord's Body and Blood as a perpetual memorial of the Sacrifice which He offered on the Cross. This memorial is a sacrifice which is identical with that which He there offered. This, too, we are taught in the Catechism; for to the question, "Why was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper ordained?" the answer is, "For the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ and of the benefits which we receive thereby."

The second purpose for which the Holy Eucharist was instituted, was to be the food of the Christian soul.

Food in the natural order is the great bond of union between man and man. We see this in the social meal in all ages and countries. And we find its most perfect fulfilment in the Holy Eucharist; for it is the Communion of the whole Body of Christ—that Body which is now divided into three parts; triumphant in heaven, expectant in the intermediate state, and militant on earth. At the

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moment when we make our Communion we are brought into the most intimate relation with every member of that great body, whether, like ourselves, still fighting on earth, or waiting in the state of purification, or already rejoicing in the glories of the beatific vision.

Then food in the natural order has ■ power of imparting its own character to those who use it; for we find in every kingdom of animate nature food playing a great part in the development of the individual. This, too, is fulfilled in the Holy Eucharist; for in it the Christ-like nature which was imparted to us in Baptism is fed by the Body and Blood of Christ; so that a Christ-like character may be formed and developed in us if we rightly use the grace of our Communions.

All the benefits of Communion depend, however, upon its right use. And this, in turn, depends largely upon our preparation for, and thanksgiving after Communion. What care, then, should we not bestow upon our preparation for each Communion, not only in regard to self-examination and penitence, but in the use of various acts of devotion, acts of love and oblation, of humility and thanksgiving. We should come, like the holy women on Easter Day, with our spices to anoint the Body of our Lord. And our spices will be our acts of devotion.

Then with what joy should we come to receive the greatest Gift that God can give to man—the

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Gift of Himself, the Gift of the Body and Blood of His dear Son, to be our spiritual Food and Sustenance !

After we have made a good preparation and a good Communion, how earnest must be our thanksgiving! We must not be satisfied merely with the Office of Thanksgiving said immediately after the Service, but make many an act of thanksgiving during the day or during the week which follows.

For many, on account of advancing years, it is not practicable to receive the Holy Communion as often as they could wish. Hence, the importance of making each Communion a great Communion —great, in the sense that it secures to us all the graces and benefits possible. It has often been said that if we could make but one Communion in our lives, we should look forward to it and prepare for it for years, and look back upon it and continue our thanksgivings for it to the end of our lives. So should it be with each Communion. Though it is not the first, it may be the last we shall ever make!

Then a word as to the difficulties of frequent Communion for those who are much confined to the house on account of physical weakness. We should not hesitate to ask the Clergy of the parish often to bring us the Holy Communion, or to celebrate for us. The Clergy are almost always most glad to do this, and only wait to be asked, hesitating sometimes to suggest their ministrations,

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lest they should not be desired. It is advisable to arrange for the regular administration of the Holy Communion at certain fixed intervals, and we should undertake to remind the Priest the day before. This would enable us to be always looking forward to and preparing for our next Communion at a certain definite time, and thus we should avoid the inconvenience of sometimes having to make ■ hurried preparation for a Communion arranged for only a short time ahead.

If we are likely to need frequent administration of the Holy Communion in our own home, it would be well, if we are able to do so, to have made a little portable altar, together with a fair linen cloth, corporal, and purificator, perhaps even the cruets for the wine and water. If we have these things, the Priest would then only have to bring the sacred vessels, which would save him inconvenience. Then, of course, for our altar, we should have ■ cross or crucifix, a pair of candlesticks, and flower vases. If we appreciate the Holy Communion as the greatest privilege of our life, we shall naturally wish to make such permanent preparations for its reverent celebration as I have indicated. They are, of course, not absolutely necessary, but they are most seemly and reverent.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Holy Scriptures.

NEXT after the Sacraments as a help to our spiritual life we must put the Word of God. In the Holy Communion we feed upon the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, Who is God the Word. In reading and meditating upon Holy Scripture we feed upon that inspired revelation which is the written Word of God. We should regard our Bible as among the most precious treasures we possess, among the greatest of God's gifts to us. And we should show that we do thus regard it by being diligent to read it, to study it, and to try to learn from it God's message to our own souls.

There are many who both read and study the Bible diligently, and yet obtain from it but little food for their souls, because they read it only as they read other books, not recognising in it the Word of God. They find it, perhaps, intensely interesting, and they take delight in bringing to

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bear upon its elucidation many other studies. They pride themselves, perhaps, on their knowledge of the contemporary history of the different books of the Bible, of the geography of the lands therein mentioned, perhaps even of the languages in which it is written. All these things are useful if we add to them the one supreme truth which must ever be kept in view in reading the Bible—that it is the Word of God, the message of God to the soul.

That we may read it aright, and gather from it food for our spiritual nature, there are some points which we should carefully keep in view. It is well to begin our Bible reading with an act of faith, and with prayer—an act of faith, in the fact that it is the Word of God; and of prayer to the Holy Ghost, to bring home its teachings to our minds. The helpfulness of our Bible reading will depend not a little on the way in which we approach it, on this act of faith and prayer which we make day by day before beginning to read.

Afterwards we must finish our reading with a thanksgiving and a prayer—a thanksgiving for what God has taught us through our reading of His word, and a prayer that we may carry the lessons into effect in our daily life.

Then, do not read too much at a time. It is far better to read a few paragraphs, and to think them over, and to apply them to our own needs,

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than to read a whole chapter, and, because of the abundance of its teaching, perhaps to fail to apply any part of it practically to ourselves. It is well to try to get some simple thought each time from our Bible reading, some thought which we can carry with us through the day, like a flower plucked in the morning from our garden to refresh us by its perfume throughout the day.

Of course, we should read our Bible regularly every day; and, if possible, we should have some definite time set apart for this reading. We take our meals at regular hours. And if we were sometimes to miss them for a day or two, we should lose strength; while, if we were irregular in taking food, we should probably injure our health. So it is with the food of the soul. If we sometimes miss reading our Bible for a day, or perhaps even more, we naturally lose spiritual strength; while, if we read it at all sorts of odd times, we are not likely to read it with devotion or with much benefit to our souls.

We should always approach our reading as learners, and with a spirit of childlike docility and simplicity. We must read, not to find support for our own opinions, but to hear the Voice and to learn the Will of God.

Naturally, we shall read most often, and with the greatest affection, the record of the words and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ in the holy Gospels. We should read these until we not only know them

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by heart, but feel that they have their special application to the needs of our own life. If, for instance, we are reading of our Lord's miracles of healing the sick, raising the dead, and feeding the multitude, we ought to apply each of them in some way to ourselves ; for the various forms of disease which He healed were types of diseases of the soul with which we are either afflicted, or at least threatened. For who has not suffered more or less from spiritual deafness, and dumbness, and blindness, and lameness ?

If we are reading our Lord's parables, we shall find in them ever new practical lessons, helping us to meet the difficulties of our own life. If it is our Lord's discourses with His chosen apostles even then we may learn something, probably much, from what He taught them.

Then there are the Epistles. And to understand these aright it is important that we should know something of the circumstances under which they were written, and especially of the character and difficulties of those to whom they were addressed. This we can only learn, of course, by studying carefully some good commentary on each Epistle. In the Acts of the Apostles we shall find the foundation and early history of the Christian Church, with brief biographies of the two great apostles, S. Peter and S. Paul.

The Book of Revelation is full of wonderful lessons, and, perhaps more than any book of the

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New Testament, it needs to be read with the guidance of some good commentary.¹

We must not, however, pass over the Old Testament. It is all the Word of God, and we profess in the Nicene Creed that the Holy Ghost "spake by the Prophets." In the Old Testament we learn many lessons of God's wonderful providence in preparing the world for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; and there, perhaps, almost more than in the New, are we able to study the characters of those great saints of God, whose histories are so fairly and so vividly sketched. We cannot but be struck with the fairness with which their faults, as well as their virtues, are recorded, and with the vividness which enables us, by means of a few short chapters, to feel that we really know intimately the character of the man.

The Bible is both a revelation of God and a revelation of man. Man in his strength and in his weakness, in his joys and sorrows, in his failures and successes, is so clearly set before us, that there is no book in the world in which we can study the human character so well as in the Bible, and this is especially the case with the Old Testament. The very fact that we only know the salient features

I would recommend as a very suggestive, and at the same time not too difficult a Commentary, the work of the Right Rev. W. Boyd Carpenter, D.D., Bishop of Ripon, published in the "New Testament Commentary for English Readers," edited by Bishop Ellicott, but to be obtained in a separate volume.

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of each life directs our attention to these, and saves us from being confused by an abundance of detail.

Then in the Book of Job we have the greatest drama of temptation which has ever been written; in the Psalms and the Song of Songs the most wonderful communing of the soul with God. Every book has its purpose, every book has something to teach us, if we only read it carefully, seeking the guidance of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to understand it.

It is often a good plan to take some one book of the Old Testament, and, with the aid of a commentary, to master it thoroughly. Moreover in all our Bible reading we should keep in view the fact that we are storing up material for meditation, for the effectiveness of our meditations will depend a great deal upon the accuracy and fulness of our knowledge of the Word of God.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Spiritual Reading.

FTER the reading and studying of Holy Scripture, as a help to the spiritual life, comes spiritual reading — by which we mean the reading of works on the spiritual life, and especially the biographies of the Saints.

All good reading, even if it be not of a distinctly spiritual character, is, in many ways, indirectly helpful to spiritual progress; for in occupying our time profitably it delivers us from many temptations to idleness. Then, too, in occupying the mind, it to some extent saves us from the dangers of day-dreaming; and in supplying subjects for conversation it preserves us from the fault of either talking about ourselves with vanity, or about our neighbours, perhaps, without charity.

While all good reading does this for us, spiritual reading does much more; for it kindles our affection for God, and teaches us, from the experiences of others, much which is of great value to our own spiritual lives.

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We must not, however, confound spiritual reading with the study of theology. Both are good; but, while the study of theology is the highest exercise of the gift of understanding, spiritual reading helps to develop the still greater gift of wisdom, the greatest of all gifts of the Holy Spirit.

While all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to each individual in Baptism and Confirmation, yet each seems to appropriate and use certain gifts more than others, and the exercise of these gifts has produced for the edification of the Church certain classes. To speak now of only two—the special development of the gift of understanding has produced the theologians of the Church; and that of wisdom, its ascetic or spiritual writers.

Our spiritual reading will cover three different classes of books: first, that great class, standing quite by itself, consisting of a very small number of books, which should be read over and over again as the sublimest production of the human mind exercised upon the things of God. At the head of this class we should put "The Imitation of Christ," by S. Thomas a Kempis; and add, though scarcely upon the same plane, "The Spiritual Combat of Scupoli," "The Confessions of S. Augustine," and perhaps "The Devout Life of S. Francis de Sales." These books should be our constant companions, often taken up and

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read, not necessarily consecutively, but that we may be refreshed and edified by their wonderful teachings. S. Francis de Sales himself tells us that he carried around with him "The Spiritual Combat," and read it over and over again; while many of the spiritual children of S. Francis have done the same with his own delightful Treatise on the Devout Life. "The Confessions of S. Augustine" is, of course, a work of ■ very different character, a wonderful revelation of the struggles and aspirations of a great soul in its efforts to find and to rest in God.

In the next class we should place that large number of spiritual works which form the ascetic library of the Christian. They are far too many to be enumerated here, since they consist of all the various approved treatises on the spiritual life of the soul.

Lastly, we have the lives of the Saints; and we shall find in these a helpfulness all their own; for as we read them we are permitted to see the workings of the Holy Ghost in souls which have yielded themselves altogether and unreservedly to Him; we behold in them the wonderful fruits of the Spirit, manifested in lives of attractive saintliness.

Then, to help us, is always the thought that the Saints, however great they were, were only men and women like ourselves. They were not drawn from any one class; for we find in their

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ranks old and young, rich and poor, intellectual and unlearned. They had no gifts which we do not possess; for they had only the gifts of grace which Christ so abundantly supplies to all who seek them, through the ministrations of the Church. They had the same Word of God to read and meditate upon, the same Sacraments of the Church to feed upon, the same Holy Ghost to be their Guide, the same Lord Jesus Christ to be their Example. The only way in which the Saints differed from us was that they used to the full the grace which God gave them; and we, alas! so often receive the grace of God in vain; that is, we receive it, and do not use it.

As we read the lives of the Saints, then, we may say to ourselves, "There is no sufficient reason why I should not become like this." We may not all at once be able to give up our will so lovingly to God, to welcome suffering and humiliation so cheerfully; but if we try, and ask God to help us, there is nothing to prevent our succeeding as they succeeded. Of course it would be very foolish to think that we could imitate the Saints in all things; because the special character of saintliness which we may admire in an individual Saint depended a good deal on his temperament and natural gifts. But the general type of saintliness, the intense love of God—and, because of this love, the willing surrender of our will to God, and the glad acceptance of the

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disciplined life—this is within the reach of all of us, and, as I have said, only depends upon our faithfully corresponding to God's grace.

In our spiritual reading we should be regular; we should always have some book in hand. We should not read too much at a time, but a little, slowly, often stopping to think over what we have read, and to lift up our hearts to God in prayer and thanksgiving. And then in our leisure moments, when we are walking, or resting, or sleepless, we should recall some of the helpful thoughts which we have gathered from our spiritual reading.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Joys of Old Age.

MUCH that would come under this head has already been said in the Chapter on "Heavenly-mindedness,"¹ and there are but few words I would add in taking leave of my readers.

The chief joy of old age is the realisation of the nearness of the moment when the message will reach us, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."² To live on in loving anticipation of this moment, when we shall see face to face Him Whom we have loved here, though we have not seen, when we shall behold Him Whom we have worshipped for so many years beneath the sacramental veils—this anticipation is in itself a lasting joy; and then to remember that each day brings us a day nearer to this happy vision!

How we count the days which must pass before some loved one, away on a far journey, is restored

¹ Chapter xx.

² S. John xi. 28.

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to us! So should we count the days which bring us steadily nearer to the coming of the Bridegroom of our soul. And as we count those days we shall carefully trim our lamps, and diligently see that we have oil in our vessels ready to replenish them when we hear the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him."¹

We are told of a disciple of a great saint, S. Philip Neri, that when death approached, and S. Philip was asked to break to him the news that he must die, Salviati (for that was his name) replied exultantly, in the words of the Psalm, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."² How often we have read this Psalm in the Daily Office, how many times we have gone to the house of the Lord on earth to take part in the services of His Church! What a help it would be sometimes to think of that house of God, the Church triumphant in heaven, into which we hope to enter *once*, and to abide there for ever; that house where we shall meet with all the glorious company of heaven—the holy angels, the blessed saints, and those loved ones who have gone before us in the faith of Jesus Christ!

As the years creep on, we are waiting for the news that our time has come to leave this troublesome world and to enter upon the joys of heaven. Ought we not to try to train ourselves constantly

¹ S. Matt. xxv. 6.

² Psalm cxxii. 1.

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to say, "I shall be glad when they say unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord"?

There are some who think of death with dread; and this is often, apparently, the effect of a certain constitutional fear of the unknown; but when they come to die, there is no dread. There are others who speak of it without fear; and yet, when it comes, find, ■■ a great surprise, that they are not prepared for it. We cannot always control our feelings in regard to this solemn event. All we can do is so to make ready for it, that we ought to be able to welcome it with joy.

The writer remembers visiting a woman suddenly stricken with death, one whom he had known for more than twenty-five years, and whose life had indeed been lived for God and His Church; and after giving her the Holy Communion, when he began to speak to her, she said, "I do not know whether I am dying or not, but I hope so." When he replied, "Then the thought of death does not distress you?" she said, "No, indeed, how could it? To go to my God, Whom I have loved, and to the dear ones whom I have lost, how could the thought of that distress me?" She was not very advanced in age, as years go; but she had spent a long life in her Master's service, and she rejoiced at the thought that her work was done, and her Lord's unveiled presence was so near.

The writer's last words to you, dear reader, are to advise you to think carefully whether you have

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left undone anything which you need to do in your preparation for your departure, or have forgotten to make proper provision from your estate for those whom God has given you—first, your own relatives, then His Church, and the poor; then to congratulate you if you are living in the spirit of those words: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let [redacted] go into the house of the Lord"

LAUS DEO.

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